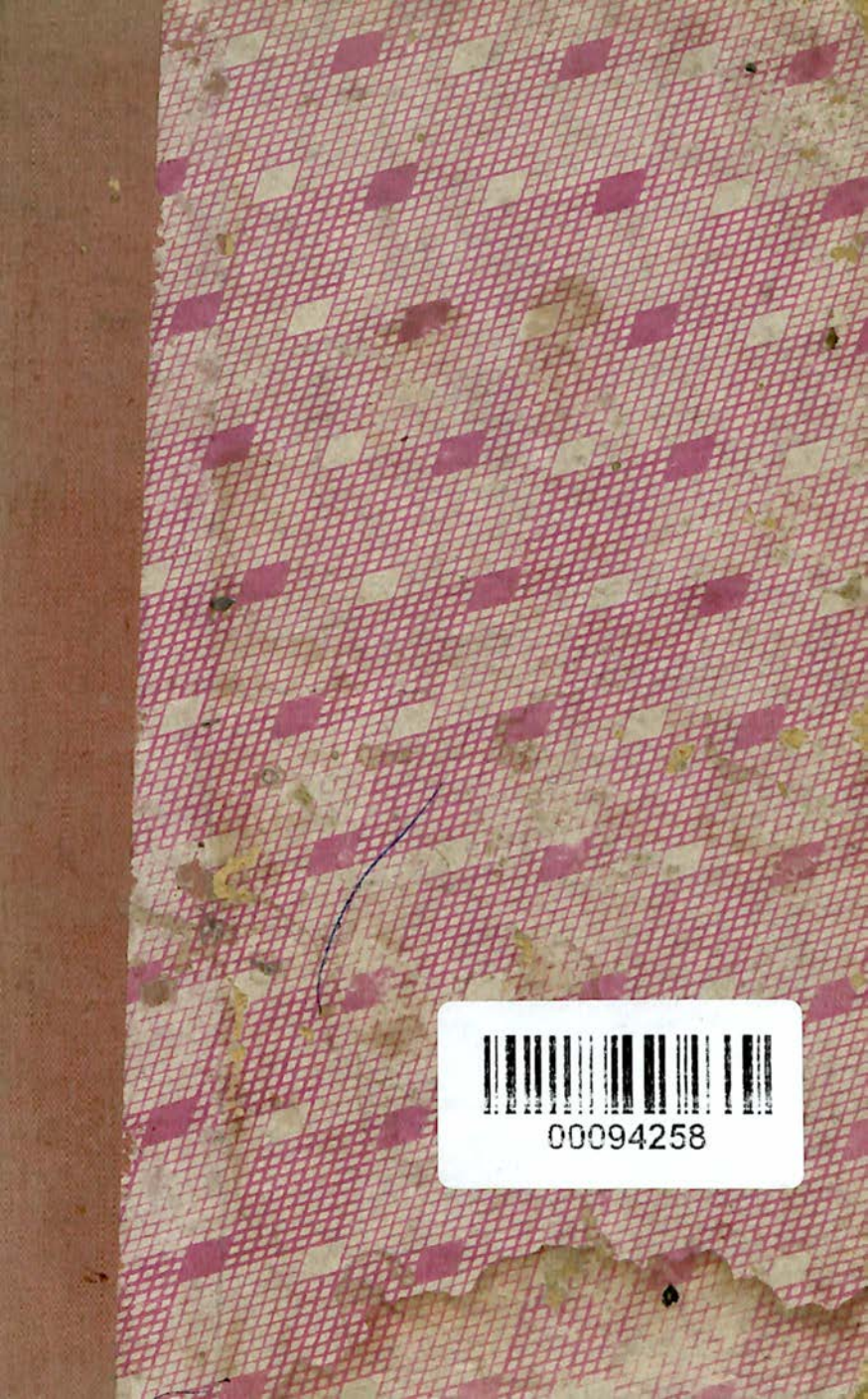
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SKETCHES

OF

HINDOO LIFE

94258

BY

DEVENDRA N. DAS, B.A.,

LATE SCHOLAR OF CLARE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, LECTURER AT THE BIRKBECK INSTITUTION, LONDON.

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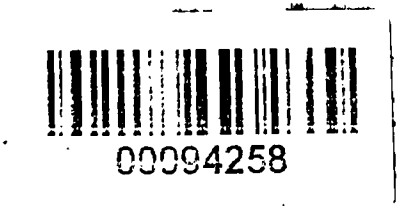

PREFACE.

IN these Sketches I have tried to depict some phases of the inner life of my countrymen in India, and to make them as clear as possible to English readers. More than half of the Sketches have appeared almost in their present form in the *St. James's Gazette*, eight in the *Standard* (Evening), one in the *Nineteenth Century*, and the rest in the *Graphic*, the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, and the *Young Folks' Paper*. I have to thank the Proprietors and Editors of these journals and periodicals for permission to reproduce them here.

DEVENDRA N. DAS.

LONDON,
October, 1887.

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SKETCHES OF HINDOO LIFE.

WORSHIP IN BENARES.

I HAVE often been asked by my English friends to describe the orthodox mode of worship in a Hindoo temple. Europeans have travelled throughout the length and breadth of India, visited almost all the places considered sacred by the Hindoos, and have lived and died in India; yet hardly any of them have been able to give an accurate description of the *poojah*, or worship, in a Hindoo temple. And the reason is not far to seek. None except strict Hindoos are allowed to step within the precincts of the Hindoo *devalays*, or abodes of gods, much less to join in the service conducted in them. It is with great pleasure, therefore, that I now recall my young days, which I spent in the city most venerated by the Hindoos—Benares.

I wake up early on an autumn morning at the confused noise of the passers-by in the street beneath: some of them shouting "Jai Sita Ram!" (victory to Sita and Ram, the heroes of Ramayana); some muttering prayers; others teaching the birds which they carry on their way to the bathing-ghát the sacred names of Krishna, Radha, etc. The sound rising most distinctly above all others is that of "Ram, Ram!" which is the morning salutation among Hindoos. I cannot remain in bed any longer. I dress myself in a hurry and start for my ablutions in the River Ganges so as to prepare for the poojah, before which we must not touch any food. Descending the steep stairs of our house, the ground-floor of which is considerably higher than the street, I find myself among a host of people, all wending their way to the ghát. The sun is just up; but its rays can hardly penetrate the narrow and tortuous streets, which are lined on both sides by lofty stone houses, most of them being five or six stories high. The shops are not yet opened; neither the trotting of a horse nor the rumbling of a carriage reaches the ear: the shouts of the people in the streets alone invade the quietness of the morning hour. After passing through a labyrinth of dark and

lofty alleys, overlooked by richly embellished balconies and projecting oriels, I reach the top of the stately flights of stairs which lead into the river.

The ghát presents quite an animated scene. The sun, which was invisible in the streets, suffuses the whole place, discovering beneath us the sacred Ganges, the very touch of whose water is supposed to wash away the sins of a devoted Hindoo. The long and spacious steps on its brink are dotted with men and women. As we descend, the shouts of bathers break in upon us more and more distinctly; and, amid the continual buzz of holy invocations, mingled with the cries of the devotees, ever and anon the sounds of "Jai, jai Siva!" "Jai, jai Kedar!" greet the ear.

I hasten down the steps, which teem with an ever-increasing crowd of bathers and worshippers. Some are ascending, their duties done; some are eagerly hurrying down to be embraced by Mother Gunga; some are counting beads while praying; some pouring forth libations in honour of the sun; some are squatting down wrapped in meditation, with eyes fixed on the ground, unconscious of all the motion and bustle around them; some are standing in the water, worshipping the flowing

stream, muttering *mantras* or incantations. I plunge beneath the hallowed waters, fondly imagining myself to be at once purified, body and soul, by the Ganges water, which itself is anything but clean and lucid. I say my prayers and then prepare for proceeding to the temple; each of us taking some water, and buying flowers and other articles on the ghát to offer to the idols and shrines which we pass on our way.

The scene which meets one's eyes as he ascends the high and spacious stairs is never to be forgotten. The streams of people, of both sexes and of all ages, that pass up and down the steps, with their shouts and salutations, with their sanctified mien and devotional attitude; the flowers of every kind and colour that lie sprinkled with water near the idols in the niches; the bathers below in the river; and, high above, the temples rearing their lofty gilded heads, from round the sides of which peep out the shady green trees; the whole panorama sparkling in the soft morning rays of an Indian sun; all these must be seen with one's own eyes before any idea can be formed of them.

We pass through the crooked and winding streets—which have now assumed a much brighter

and livelier appearance—presenting offerings and making obeisance to a number of idols in shrines and niches in the angles of the streets and under the shadow of the lofty houses. These we met before on our way to the ghát; but, not being purified by ablution in the Ganges, we could not then approach them. Huge bulls sacred to Siva, tame and inoffensive as mastiffs, saunter up and down the narrow streets, and have liberty to appropriate the flowers and fruits that hang temptingly out of our baskets; while here and there may be seen monkeys, sacred to Rama, putting their impertinent heads and hands into fruiterers' or confectioners' shops or snatching the food from the hands of little children. We walk by many ascetics' houses, adorned with idols, and sending out an unceasing strumming of curious stringed instruments. We meet at every turn Jogees and Gosains with their matted locks and deformed bodies besmeared with cow-dung, chalk, and sandal-paste; and blind persons and lepers eye our pockets or baskets, believing they all have some claim on their contents in this holiest of holy cities. At last we reach the temple of the god Bisheswar or Siva.

Bisheswar is the supreme deity here, and, in

the opinion of the Hindoos, holds the position of king over all the other deities in Benares and fifty miles around. We carry with us offerings consisting of rice, ghee or clarified butter, grain, flowers, water, etc., and pursefuls of money. We enter through the narrow doorway, the chief entrance to the temple, over which is a small figure of the god Ganes, to whom we show our respect by sprinkling a few drops of water upon his stony head. Here we take off our shoes—a process absolutely incumbent on all—but retain our head-dresses as before. In the courtyard we are besieged by a crowd of mendicants and ascetics, Brahmins and beggars, who live upon the alms bestowed, willingly or unwillingly, by the worshippers. Extricating ourselves as best we can from these, we approach the temple proper.

It may be mentioned here that in the Hindoo temples men and women worship together without the imposition of any privacy upon the latter, who are well dressed and behave themselves, and are treated by men with perfect decorum. This custom prevails in all the sacred places of the Hindoos, thus presenting a striking contrast to the practice of the Mahomedans, amongst whom women cannot pray in the mosques at

all; as also to that of the Jews, whose women, even in England, sit apart and partially hidden from the men in their synagogues.

We go up a flight of steps, and after passing through two or three vaulted rooms come into the Tower of Bisheswar itself. The chamber is full of the smoke of burning incense, and very dark, being lighted only by a few censers emitting a very feeble flame; which, however, serve to discover the body of worshippers, all dressed in white, standing on one side in mute obeisance, and a few priests, with their white robes and uncovered shaven heads, squatting on the other side round the sacred deity. The deity is a plain conical stone set on end, resting in the centre of a large trough with gilded sides, of about five feet square, a little below the level of the floor. Heaps of flowers lie around the idol, which is perpetually kept wet with the water poured by the devotees. The attendant Brahmin priests read texts out of palm-leafed Sanskrit books in a drawling, sing-song tone, ejaculating prayers and hymns in a very unintelligible manner; we making our obeisance to the god either by bowing with our hands folded or by prostrating ourselves on the ground, at the same time muttering prayers

and invoking blessings of the deity. No sermon or address is given by the officiating priests.

The service thus goes on for about half-an-hour, and all the time we are deafened by the noise of the beating of the gongs and bells attached to the temple. At a sign from the priests we pour the Ganges water, which we carried in brazen jars, over the image, the water running out through a small hole in the trough, which is connected with the drains of the place. We then make our offerings of flowers and other articles, the substantial part of which is appropriated by the priests, who also receive their special offerings of eatables and presents of money and wearing-apparel. And then our devotions are over. Threading our way through the crowd of beggars we get out of the temple and walk home.

THE JOGEE, OR ASCETIC.

EVERY traveller in Northern India has noticed, in the purlieus of temples and on the ghâts on the Ganges, gaunt and hideous figures in an almost nude state, with matted locks, faces smeared with ashes, the forehead streaked with yellow paint, a tiger-skin hanging from their shoulders, with their tridents and tongs, and their rosaries of beads, squatting on the ground motionless, wrapped in meditation or looking listlessly towards the sky. These men belong to one or other of the Hindoo monastic orders known to Europeans under the name of Jogees, which signifies "united to God."

The Jogees are the chief of the four Hindoo religious orders of the present day, with all of whom the renunciation of the world and embracing the vow of poverty and mendicancy have

always been the test and tenet. Subsisting solely on herbs and fruits, and abandoning all worldly concerns, their object is to purify the mind in solitude, and to await the appointed time of absorption with the Supreme Spirit. To them life is evil, and the body the abode of sickness, sorrow, and sin; and hence their chief aim is to mortify the body, abandon the world's affairs, and annihilate all affections. Though many and glaring abuses have sprung up in their system, and most of the modern Jogees are great hypocrites, putting on the garb of sanctity as a cloak for the beggar's trade and a corrupt life, still all the religious mendicants of India in the past were not men of this stamp. A great many among them had genuine religious feeling, and were very erudite; and though their disciples have been hopelessly degraded in morals and utterly destitute of learning, and have corrupted the Hindoo religion by introducing revolting rites and the worship of stocks and stones, the original recluses were for centuries the leaders and propagators of religion, disseminating the patriarchal notions of morality, and themselves examples of righteousness. The god Siva is the object of worship of the modern Jogees, who live in mountain caves and

in jungles. Here they mortify themselves with whips, lying on iron spikes and thorns, and practising long suppressions of breath and other penances.

But such genuine Jogees are at present very few, and only to be met with in sequestered parts near the Himalayas and in some of the Native States. Most of them that you see near the temples are Jogees in name only. These scoundrels are content to ape the outward appearance of piety, which, as is usual with all imitators, they exaggerate. They smear their body with a thick coating of ashes, twist their hair fantastically, daub their faces with yellow paints, wear necklaces of bones, and often carry a human skull to drink from. A large heavy club is a necessary part of accoutrement, and they sometimes make use of it in remote villages to stimulate charity. Often seated in places of cremation, in the midst of human ashes, with a fire blazing before them and a caldron upon it, stirring horrid ingredients and muttering uncouth spells, they affect to charm ferocious beasts into tameness and hold commerce with evil spirits. Of course all this is to inspire awe and excite terror in the minds of the ignorant.

Extraordinary are the voluntary penances which the Jogees inflict upon themselves. They sometimes hold up one arm in a fixed position till it becomes stiff. Some keep their fists firmly clenched so long that their nails grow into their palms and appear through the back of their hands. Some sit in the same posture, in midsummer, between four fires, and gaze at the sun till they lose their sense of sight. Others turn their faces over one shoulder, and keep them so till they fix for ever their heads looking backwards. Many keep their eyes fixed on the tip of their noses till they cannot look in any other direction. They force themselves to subsist on drops of rain-water and chance fruits that are drifted towards them by the wind.

Only a few years ago a Jogee was found in a jungle, in the midst of his penances, and brought down to Calcutta. He was in so helpless a state that he had to be carried like a statue—cross-legged and his arms uplifted and quite stiff. He could not be made to talk or swallow food by any means. He died in a few days.

The Jogees, and other similar ascetics are strictly enjoined by the rules of their various orders to live in wildernesses and to subsist only

on roots and fruits. Only a few of them lead such a life nowadays. But much suffering is endured even by lax disciples in traversing distant and desolate tracts of land. Some of these Jogees may be seen in the jungles near the hills, squatting under the trees and listlessly munching their half-cooked food or gathering wild fruits in the shade. At night they lie on the bare ground, or on little mats which they carry about with them, with the fallen branches of trees for their pillows. Jogees will go on long pilgrimages in this way, sometimes laden with heavy iron chains. Crossing the frontiers, they penetrate into Central Asia; and a few of them are known to have rambled as far as St. Petersburg. There are some pious and clever men among them, studying the Vedas, constantly meditating upon the Supreme Being, living a pure and religious life, and doing good deeds.

The trance and the means of enjoying it form the grand mystery of the Jogees. It is said by them that their souls are often rapt in an ecstasy of long duration; that their external senses lose their functions; that they enjoy the sight of God in the shape of a vivid white light; and that they experience transports of holy joy incomprehensible to ordinary men. There is a certain truth in all

this, and people who have visited the real Jogees in their solitudes seem to believe in these trances. It is quite possible that a man whose imagination is distempered by continued fasts and uninterrupted solitude may easily fall into such illusions. As to their long fasts and their perpetual austerities, it must not be forgotten that the pains of hunger are not half so sensibly felt in India as in colder countries, and that life continues under easy conditions in such a climate.

Certain Jogees are said to possess miraculous powers. They prepare mercury in so admirable a manner, that a grain or two swallowed every morning restores a broken-down invalid to perfect health. They tell any person his thoughts; command the branch of a tree to blossom and bear fruit within an hour; hatch an egg in their bosoms in ten minutes, producing any bird you may ask for; and execute such other prodigies as Magus could never perform. These Hindoo mystics, whose number is fast decreasing, have always excited the wonder of the world, and have exercised an unbroken spell over even the enlightened portions of humanity. Their "mysteries" have been partially utilised by the Theosophists, whose creed is but a compound of American

Spiritualism and Hindoo mysticism. The wonder-performing Jogees perambulate the country, make light of everything, affect to live in a state of nature, and seem to delight in filth and everything that should be repulsive to mankind.

But there are ascetics who seem less extravagant in their lives and devotions, and are of a more comely appearance. They walk about barefooted and bareheaded, girt with a scarf which hangs down to the knee, and wearing a white cloth that passes under the right arm and goes over the left shoulder. They appear cleanly in every respect. They do not beg from shop to shop or from passers-by, like the other Jogees, but enter freely into the houses of Hindoos, where they receive a hearty welcome, their presence being esteemed a blessing to the family. I do not know how much truth there is in it, but scandalous stories were at one time told about the relations between these meek ascetics and the women of the houses, who applied frequently for the prayers of these saintly persons in special cases; but I know this for certain, that not a few of these innocent-looking Jogees are of the loosest character.

There is a sect of Joginees, or female Jogees,

who resort to Brindában, Mathurá, and other holy places of the Hindoos in North-Western India. They are called Bhairabees, and devoted to Sacti, the female counterpart of Siva. They take a vow of celibacy; and very often they are sincere and pure-minded enthusiasts. Happily, female Jogeeism is fast going out of vogue. One now sees in very few places a woman who has renounced the world pass from city to city with a vermilion spot on her forehead, a cloth of dull orange on her body, a long trident in one hand and a hollow gourd in the other.

THE LOTUS.

THE monsoon bursts over India in June; the whole land becomes covered as if by magic with a verdant carpet, and all nature acquires fresh life and vigour after the long spell of dry, blighting hot weather. And who that has ever lived in that country can forget at the time the fragrant freshness of the air, the moist dark-green trees laden with fruits and blossoms, the smiling flowers of every hue and shade, the shooting of newly sown crops, the feeling of relief on the pale faces of the ryots, and the revivified countenance of all men and animals? But nothing do I miss so much as the beautiful lotus, the queen of Indian flowers, the adored of poets and the favourite of gods.

Lotuses grow in the tropical regions of Asia,

Africa, Australia, and elsewhere; their chief home being India, where they grow abundantly, extending as far to the north-west as Cashmere, where they are seen to perfection. They not only bear the loveliest of flowers, they also serve for very useful purposes to both men and animals. Somewhat resembling tulips, but much larger, you can see them in full bloom after the rains in nearly all the lakes and ponds, on the waters of which the smiling pink or white flowers stand upright over the large, graceful green leaves. Though common, I have seldom seen them grow in large towns or in dirty ponds and tanks; and when they once take root in any clean piece of water, they grow luxuriantly without care or protection.

The lotus is a large flower, 4 in. to 10 in. in diameter, with vinous smell; its petals are elliptic, concave, and veined. The fruiting torus is 2 in. to 4 in. in diameter; the ripe carpels vary from the size of a pea to that of a small cherry. In some parts, the natives live on lotus-seeds. The long, fine filaments contained within the cells of the flower are drawn out, and the thread spun from the filament is used as wicks for the lamps in temples and pagodas. The lotus-leaves are

very large and round, 2 ft. to 3 ft. in diameter, membranous, cupped, and covered with a fine bloom or white powder easily rubbed off. Sometimes whole lakes are entirely covered over with them, so that you can hardly see the water underneath. These leaves serve as plates for very poor people, and elephants have a great liking for them as food. In the remote solitary parts of the country you can sometimes see several elephants, half hidden under the water, lustily devouring lotus-leaves and stems. The stalks are 3 ft. to 6 ft. high, full of spiral vessels, smooth or with small scattered prickles. In hot weather the stalks are commonly eaten by the poorer classes, and boiled in their curries. The root of the lotus is 2 ft. to 3 ft. long, and pierced longitudinally with several holes. When boiled it is of a yellowish colour and sweetish taste, not unlike turnip. It is believed to be good and highly nutritious, and forms a favourite dish with the inhabitants of Cashmere.

The principal varieties of the lotus are the white, the red, and the blue. The first has large white flowers with sepals, the root being large, tuberous, and eatable. The red species grows in tanks in peninsular India and in Bengal. Its

flowers appear at the close of the rains, and are of an intense red or dark-crimson colour, whence its Sanskrit name "blood-lotus." The blue lotus, with its small flowers, grows in ponds and tanks in the same parts. Its varieties grow in Bengal, and are common in Ajmere and the Pashkur Lake. The large bluish flowers are used medicinally, being considered cooling and astringent. There is another well-known variety of the lotus. It is called the pigmy, being a very diminutive water-lily. Its flower is no larger than a half-crown; it grows in the Khassya Hills, in the north of India, in China, and in Siberia.

The lotus is seen in its greatest splendour in Cashmere. It is very common on every expanse of water in that country; the leaves are so large and numerous that in some places they form a green carpet, over which ducks and moor-hens run securely to and fro. When the flowers are in full blossom, after the rains, such places present a beautiful sight. Lilies of various colours and shades peep from amidst the green leaves, which rest lightly and gracefully on the water; while the magnificent lotus, with its gigantic leaf and tall and quivering stem, appears

in the midst of this floating garden like a reigning beauty, bowing with modest yet dignified grace at the homage and admiration of her gaily bedecked courtiers and attendants.

The lotus is highly venerated by the Hindoos. It is the immediate attribute of Vishnoo, who in Hindoo mythology is represented as seated upon the lotus in the midst of waters. It is also peculiarly sacred to Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnoo, who is sometimes called Kamala or lotus. In the Hindoo theogony the floating lotus is an emblem of the world; the whole plant signifies both the earth and its two principles of fecundation. The flower is a favourable offering at the Hindoo temples, where it also enters into all the ornaments of brass vessels used in the service of the idols. There is a legend that the red lotus was dyed by the blood of Siva that flowed from the wound made by the arrow of Káma, the Indian Cupid.

The flower has been a favourite theme of the Indian poets from time immemorial. It has the high honour of being designated in Sanskrit by at least fifty ordinary names besides the special ones for its varieties, some of them being very

expressive, as "lake-born," "water-born," "hundred-leafed." Sanskrit poets largely use the lotus as the emblem of female beauty. A beautiful face or lovely eyes are compared to the full-blown lotus or the opening buds, while the tall and quivering stem and the graceful filaments stand for the well-shaped body and the arms. In the *Ratnávali*—a Sanskrit play written in the twelfth century—Vasantaka says to his lady-love, "My beloved Ságariká, thy countenance is as radiant as the moon; thy eyes are two lotus-buds; thy hand is the full-blown flower, and thy arms its graceful filaments." Kálidás's works are full of such comparisons, one of the prettiest being that passage in "Sakuntalá," where the king, observing from a distance Sakuntalá carrying a water-jar in her father's hermitage, her graceful form being only clad in knotted bark, thus describes her: "As the lotus, though overgrown with weeds, is still supremely beautiful, so is this damsel, pale and trembling, though clad in simple bark. What is not beautiful on a beauty?" Even philosophers take to the lotus for the illustration of their gloomy maxims. In a well-known verse in "Mohamudgara," the philosophic poet compares

the fleeting human life to the unstable quivering water on the smooth glossy petal of the lotus, which is continually undulated by the breeze blowing on it.

THE ASTROLOGER.

ONCE, missing some property of ours, and finding no clue whatever to its illegal destination, we took counsel with our friends and neighbours, and they advised us that our best course would be to consult the great astrologer of our country-town about it. So next morning a friend and myself started for the astrologer's house, which lies at the other end of the small town. Reaching his cottage, we found him squatting, in the midst of a confused mass of papers, on a mat in the shady verandah, evidently absorbed in some deep astronomical calculations.

Our Daivak, or astrologer, is a Brahmin of high order, next to that of the priests; a man apparently of profound learning, acquainted with all the mysteries of the universe, deeply versed

in the knowledge of the heavens, and reputedly infallible in the forecast of futurity and in divination. His large eyes are firmly bent downwards on a piece of wood, over which his right hand with a piece of chalk in the fore-fingers slowly moves, while he holds in the left a long yellow paper. His head is completely shaven, except on the back, where a small tuft of hair has been left religiously growing; and the white *tilac*, or caste-mark, stands in strong relief on his high forehead furrowed by wrinkles. He is of light complexion, with fine regular features bearing an expression of calmness and meditation, large round eyes, a sharp aquiline nose, thin well-curved lips slightly open and moving as if muttering something, and smooth rounded chin unnaturally firm. He is attired in a thin white robe, leaving bare, however, his brawny arms and his broad chest. Notwithstanding his state of constraint, the wrinkles on his forehead and the gray tuft of hair indicate that he has passed the fifth decade of his life. From the colour of the paper in his left hand and the drawings on it, we know at once that the Daivak is engaged in casting a horoscope. Dreading to disturb the Brahmin in the midst of his calculations, we walk up and

down for a while, enjoying the soft breeze that blows through the tall trees round the cottage, and glancing now and then at his horoscope.

The casting of the horoscope is the chief work of the Hindoo astrologer. It is a long yellow paper, about 8 in. in width, and 15 ft. to 20 ft. in length, full of figures, and zodiacal signs, and short sentences in Sanskrit. It is rolled up when not used. The astrologer, noting the exact moment of birth of a child, observes the position of the sun, moon, and stars at that time; and, making long calculations as to their influences, indicates on the yellow paper the fortunes of the child up to the hundredth year. He mentions whether the child will grow up learned or ignorant, prosperous or unsuccessful in the world, rich or poor, and so on. But he always manages to augur well of the children of his patrons; and he takes great care to display fully the good events in the lives of rich men's sons, suppressing as far as possible the bad ones. A few misfortunes are also noted down, the most serious of which are predicted to happen about the tenth, thirtieth, and sixtieth years. He will also describe the in-

fluences which the heavenly bodies will shed during each month of the child's future life.

The horoscope, which Hindoo families get carefully prepared for every male child (girls have small meagre ones) by their own astrologers, is religiously believed in (alas! not so by modern young men) and fondly preserved by the parents, who refer to it on all important occasions. And they go through expensive rites and severe penances in order to propitiate the gods and avert the apprehended misfortunes before they come to pass. The yellow roll has its other uses. In a court of justice the horoscope is examined to verify the exact age of a person; and before marriages it is consulted to see that the stellar mansions under which the young man and the young lady were born completely agree.

As soon as we notice that the astrologer has finished his calculations, we humbly approach and salute him. Blessing us, he shows us a mat, whereon seated we apprise him of the nature of our errand. From the respectable look of his inquirers, he shrewdly guesses that we must have lost something valuable. Consulting his mysterious book, as is his custom, he glances at us,

again looks into his book, then, putting down his piece of wood, scrawls on it all sorts of figures and pictures, muttering something to himself all the while.

After a few minutes the Daivak, raising his head, looks intently in our faces. He then addresses us thus, still watching our countenances: "You have lost an article—an article; of a metallic nature—of a metallic nature; gold—gold; I see—humph—diamond—diamond; gold and diamond" (here he looks hard into our eyes); "yes, it is a gold—gold ring, diamond set. It is wrapped up in a piece of linen in the eaves of the cottage-thatch of your maid-servant."

At this answer we well-nigh break into convulsive laughter. However, endeavouring very hard to keep a serious countenance before our venerable astrologer, we humbly inform him that his reverence is not quite right this time in his calculations, for we have lost no such thing as a gold ring, diamond set. All the property we miss is a fat cow.

Not a bit abashed, the Daivak, looking down on his piece of wood, shouts out instantly: "Oh yes, yes, yes; I made a slight slip here—I put

a wrong figure. It is all right now. Of course; you are right, it is a cow. You will find it in the house of your maid-servant." The fat cow was, however, not found wrapped up in a piece of linen in the eaves of the cottage-thatch of our maid-servant.

This is not the first time that the venerable astrologer, reputedly infallible in the forecast of the future and in divination, made a "slight slip" by putting a wrong figure. But he has a clever way of palliating his little mistakes, whose number is legion. If anything turns out contrary to what he has put down in the horoscope, or if he makes a wrong guess in divining—which he very often does—he ascribes it to the fact that the precise moment of the child's birth or the occurrence was not told him; and as the people of India do not carry chronometers with them, the diviner finds it a very safe door to escape by. Again, the old Daivak, who is a sharp man of the world, notwithstanding his calmness and meditation, sometimes does make out the true fact by reading it, as it were, on the features of his simple patrons. Hence the credulous people flock to him whenever they miss a cow or an ornament

of value, and the diviner's plate gets filled with copper pieces, which make up a handsome income for him.

Besides casting horoscopes and divining, the Indian astrologer performs other lucrative works. Soon after the birth of a child the family astrologer is sent for, who tells, without even seeing the child or its mother, the complexion and figure of the former. He also professes to foretell on the spot whether the child's life will turn out happy or miserable. The orthodox Hindoos never engage in any serious business, enter into any important ceremony, or set out on a long journey, without first consulting the astrologer. He foretells the auspicious and inauspicious days for everything. His predictions generally overshoot the mark; but such is the spell of the Daivak's calculations on the minds of the ignorant people, that they attribute the failure rather to their own bad luck than to the fallibility of the diviner. The astrologer also undertakes, at the beginning of every year, to read the new almanack in the houses of orthodox Hindoos in the country, giving a general prevision of the leading astronomical phenomena and astrological events of the coming

year; and every person who listens to him pays him something.

In the villages the Daivak, not satisfied with all this work, adventures into fresh fields. Perhaps on a summer morning he makes a call on one of his patrons, and with a wry face informs him that a great evil is coming over his son. The timid father, anxious for the welfare of his only child, begs the astrologer to let him know any means of averting it. The diviner gravely replies, "It seems a very difficult business; but, if you like, I will let you know to-morrow what I can do for it." Early next morning appears the astrologer, armed with his magical book and some loose papers with figures and scrawls on them. He deciphers them to his patron, telling him that it will cost about £5 to make a *jág* or burnt-offering of sandal-wood and ghee to propitiate the gods. The affectionate parent helplessly assents; the shrewd astrologer makes a handsome business of it.

Sometimes he tells an heirless rich man how to be blessed with a child; and there are hundreds of superstitious people who hesitate not to spend 4,000 or 5,000 rupees in the fond hope of getting an heir; the astrologer, of course, securing the

best prize in the affair. At other times he drives poor mothers into agony and despair by bluntly telling them that their eldest son is going to meet with a fatal accident. But as a rule the diviner is astutely polite and soft-spoken. He lets out that he knows the misfortune befalling any one, but he will not tell it and cause pain beforehand, unless he is pressed (with a little fee) to do so; and he always says to desponding people with money that a fine prospect is awaiting them in the future.

There are some astrologers who have no fixed home. They go about from place to place, forecasting and divining; and the timid, illiterate villagers flock round the roving seers and give them presents to have their fortunes foretold or their calamities averted. Thus they travel from one village to another, wringing money from the superstitious poor and eating wholesome dinners into the bargain. They have no fixed incomes, their earnings depending on the localities they frequent. Some of them grow fat and rich. They settle down in later life, decline to have anything to do with the rustic beggars, and die as astrologers in ordinary to Rajah Bigdolt or

Zemindar Squeezeryot. Others are not so fortunate. They live and die poor, very agreeable to all, and do not mind earning a farthing from a stray customer in a shabby village.

THE ZEMINDAR AT HOME.

OUR Zemindar's house is the largest and most imposing building in the village. It faces the south, as most houses in the country in Northern India do. The mansion presents a somewhat heavy appearance on the outside; the outer gate is built of solid masonry, with a colossal door of sál wood studded with huge nails and surmounted with the figure, in plaster, of a lion. As we enter the house we see before us a court-yard of about sixty feet square, in front of which is a spacious hall supported by arches. On the other three sides run covered verandas two stories high, beyond which are the several suites of rooms where the landlord and his officials hold receptions and transact business. This part of the building is called the outer house, and from it the female members of the family are excluded. The hall is

used only on religious and festive occasions. The worship of the gods is performed there; and dramatic and pantomimic exhibitions are held in the open courtyard below, over which a large canopy is then suspended. Further north is another courtyard, smaller than the first, which is built round on all sides with verandas similar to those in the other courtyard but not half so imposing, and the rooms are much smaller with fewer windows. This part of the house is the zenana.

It is eight o'clock in the morning. The house already wears an animated appearance. People of all sorts and conditions are continually going to and fro. Ascending to the grand reception-room we find it crowded with people, the larger number of whom are courtiers and Brahmins, who are squatted on the floor, over which thick carpets and white sheets are spread. A dozen windows and doors, all wide open, let in a flood of light and a continual stream of fresh air. Chandeliers, suspended from the ceiling, reflect all the colours of the rainbow, and the morning light lends brightness to the few indifferent pictures that hang upon the whitewashed walls.

The Zemindar enters the chamber; the party assembled rise and, making low obeisance, greet

him with their morning salutations: except the Brahmins, who remain seated and offer their blessings to their patron. Our landlord is a well-built man, of a light complexion, tall, and proportionately stout. After returning the salutations he squats down on a raised cushioned part of the floor. He casts a glance over the assembly, and his bright, large, and rolling eyes send forth every moment flashes of lightning, from which even his most confident advisers or his sturdiest tenants shrink. His voice is powerful and of immense volume. The silver streaks in his hair indicate that he has passed the fourth decade of his life.

No sooner is he seated than a host of his ryots come crowding near the doors, all impatient to catch his eye. One by one they pour forth their grievances and complaints. One ryot pitifully complains against the collector, who has seized his cow worth twenty rupees for a very small sum of rent left unpaid. Another, with tears in his eyes, says that the collector has threatened to evict him from his ancestral home unless he pays down the rent due at once, which he cannot do at present owing to the bad season. He throws himself upon his lordship's mercy, and swears that

he will pay his rent directly he sells his new crop. Another comes forward and woefully asks the advice of the "father of the people" about his cattle, which have been stolen away by some rogues from the neighbouring village. And so runs the long list of grievances. If the Zemindar is in a good mood, he patiently listens to them, and in the more pressing cases will order his servants immediately to go with the ryots to their cottages and make inquiries on the spot. If, on the contrary, he happens to be in a bad temper, he does not lend his ears at all to their grievances, and very unceremoniously orders his servants to put them out of doors. Meantime he smokes his hookah and gossips with his courtiers. Thus passes the morning of the Zemindar.

After breaking up his miniature Court the Zemindar takes to his bath, which generally occupies an hour or so, and then, retiring to the inner apartments, partakes of the chief meal of the day. He then enjoys his siesta for two or three hours. As the afternoon gets cooler his companions and courtiers drop in, who engage him in conversation—generally on very commonplace subjects; for the Zemindar and his companions spend their time in the same little circle.

Perhaps he takes a walk with his friends, and sometimes, though rarely, goes on a visit of superintendence to the village and its outlying parts. Outdoor pursuits do not find much favour with the Zemindars, especially in the hot season; but a few of them take to fishing and hunting. Many of the young Zemindars spend their evenings in playing cards, chess, etc., and are often tempted into gambling. This gambling has been the ruin of many Indian landlords. To this vice may be added dissipation and drinking, the latter vice being a modern one.

The elderly Zemindars are generally very good and religious, and spend their leisure hours in reading sacred books and discussing logic and philosophy with the village Pandits. Their evenings are devoted to listening to the professional readers, who recite passages from Ramayana and Mahabharata and kindred books in a chanting manner. The number of bad and selfish Zemindars is decreasing, and, as a body, the landowners in India are kind and charitable. In times of distress they ungrudgingly give away or lend money to their helpless tenants, and personally do their best to alleviate their sufferings. The purses of the Zemindars are always open

at times of famine and other national calamities; and when any subscription is set on foot for benevolent purposes, the Zemindars contribute to it handsomely. Besides, they often have poojahs and festivals in their houses, to which they invite all the village people and give them presents and alms.

The greatest blot in the Zemindar's character is his passion for litigation. The law of primogeniture is unknown in India, and on the death of any individual his property is equally, or very nearly so, divided among his sons or heirs. This gives rise to great jealousy, and forms the fruitful source of innumerable processes of law. This litigiousness is very often carried to a bitter extreme. They would rather go through every available process of law, beginning from the lowest court in the land and ending with broken fortunes in the highest, than amicably settle their disputes among themselves or submit them to arbitration. And what bickerings and animosities reign in these Zemindars' families! An acre of land turns dearest brothers into bitterest enemies; a little misunderstanding over an old pond sets the young nephew mortally against his aged uncle. Several Zemindars have been reduced to beggary

through these life-long lawsuits, and some have died broken-hearted in utter destitution. Nevertheless, it is hard to dissuade a Zemindar from resorting to law, which in most cases forms the only excitement in his vacuous life.

NAUTCH GIRLS.

NAUTCH, or dancing girls, were beheld with great astonishment by the early European travellers in India; and, though now disparaged and neglected by Europeans, they form one of the greatest sources of amusement and diversion to the natives of India, and as objects of curiosity they are not destitute of interest. They are professional dancers, and belong to a particular caste, which is considered as similar to that of the snake-charmers and jugglers. Like the same class of women in Ancient Greece—where they were employed to enliven banquets and festivities at private houses—they are commonly selected for their great personal beauty, the elegant contour of their limbs, the lightness of their forms, the ease and gracefulness of their movements, the fineness of their voice, and their sparkling vivacity of temper. They

are all handsome, and some of them are possessed of extraordinary beauty. Their soft, dark eyes, and their flowing raven hair are bewitching; and many expert European dancers have been struck with astonishment at the wiry movements of their limbs.

These girls are taught their art from their childhood, and have to go through a severe course of training before they are allowed to appear at entertainments. Many of them hardly deserve the appellation of girls, as nautch girls are often seen in India performing with their grown-up daughters. Most of them, however, are young and unmarried, and it is the interest of the profession that they should remain in the state of maidenhood. The dancing girls generally sing as they dance, and they are invariably accompanied by musicians playing on instruments resembling the violin and guitar. Their dances require great attention, their feet being adorned with anklets and other ornaments, from which hang small bells, which act in concert with the music. Two girls usually perform at the same time. Their steps are not so mazy or active as those of the European dancers, but they are much more interesting; and their songs, the music, and the motions of

the dance combine to express love, hope, jealousy, despair, and the passions well-known by lovers, and easily understood by those who are ignorant of their language. Their songs are often melodious, and there is a great seductive charm in their sweet languishing strains.

Respecting the dress of the dancing girls, a little difference is noticed as we descend from the north to the south of India. In general their dresses are very rich and gorgeous; and sometimes there is such an enormous quantity of coloured petticoats and trousers, so many shawls wrapped round their waists, and such a variety of skirts peeping out below each other, that their figures are almost entirely hidden. Perfumes; elegant and attractive attire, particularly of the head; sweet-scented flowers intertwined with exquisite art about their beautiful hair; a multitude of ornamental trinkets, adapted with infinite taste to the different parts of the body; a graceful carriage and measured step, indicating luxurious delight—such are the charms of these enchanting damsels. Some of the young dancing girls from Cashmere possess such surpassing beauty, grace, and elegant accomplishments, that it is difficult to convey by words any tolerable idea of them.

As to the character of the nautch girls, there seems to be very little difference of opinion about it. There are many, no doubt, among them who are as respectable as any other class of women, and who are made to adopt their profession by compulsion; but the dancing girls in India generally bear a character that will not stand much examination. They lead an irregular course of life: respectable Hindoo women would not appear thus before the public. They have no social position, belonging to a low caste; and they lead a life which is exposed to the worst temptations and vices.

Nautch girls are paid according to celebrity as to their beauty, fine voice, and skill in dancing. Their services are engaged at weddings and all principal festivals. Native princes have nautches at their palaces almost every evening; the maharajahs, rajahs, zemindars, and other wealthy individuals being their chief patrons. The liking for these dances is sometimes carried to an extreme point. Some of the Hindoos, as well as the Mahomedans, in a spirit of rivalry or infatuation, make the girls dance on extensive tables of elaborate workmanship borne on the shoulders of bearers of a very low caste, called Kahars. These

professional female dancers used to earn incomes as high as those of the Ministers at the Courts of the native Kings in their palmy days. In modern times a girl has been known to refuse 10,000 rupees, or about £1,000 sterling, for performing three nights at the Court of the Nizam of Hyderabad. At some of the poojahs, or great religious festivals of the great Hindoo families of Calcutta, dancing girls of repute used to be retained a month previous to the festival, at a fee varying from five hundred to a thousand rupees each for three nights. But these days of pride and prosperity are fast passing away; and a nautch girl of not exceptional celebrity can now be engaged in India for an evening for fifty rupees or a little more.

THE RYOT'S COTTAGE.

It is early morning in the month of May, and we stroll from our country house into the fields in that part of India where the Ganges makes a sharp bend in its downward course. All nature seems to be newly wakening into life. The breeze, wafting the fragrance of the opening flowers, is blowing from the south fresh and cool; and the cuckoo, the bulbul, and the parrots in their variegated plumage, sitting amidst the dark-green foliage of the large shady trees, are joyously greeting the rising sun. And, early as it is, we find the ryot busy in tilling the ground and sowing the áman, or winter crop, the most important of the three crops in the year.

Our peasant here is a tall man, past forty, of muscular limbs, very dark in complexion, wearing only a loin-cloth and an apology for a turban. He

hums a village tune as he holds the light plough with both hands. But, light as the plough is, he succeeds in making a shallow furrow in the surface in which to deposit the grain. A hoe, a mattock, and two or three other implements of the rudest sort, exactly similar to those used by his forefathers centuries ago, are all the tools necessary for the husbandman's operations. On talking to him we find that, though quite illiterate and without any pretensions to a proper knowledge of agriculture, he yet well understands the rotation of crops, can class the soils with great minuteness, and is well informed about the produce for which each is best suited and the mode of cultivation it requires.

As the sun grows very hot, the ryot, leaving his implements in the field and his bullocks grazing under a large tree, departs for his home in the small village about two or three miles away. Accompanying him under a sky in which not a speck of cloud is seen, we approach the village, which is surrounded by clumps of bamboo and by scrub jungle, the growth of a fertile soil not carefully weeded. The village is a collection of mud huts with thatched roofs, and crowded with people of all ages, ill-clad and indifferently fed.

Here and there may be seen a small pond with its water very low and turbid, for the monsoon has not burst yet to replenish it. There are not more than half-a-dozen shops in the village to supply the necessaries of life, most of which are procured by the villagers at the weekly market, held under a magnificent banian-tree, which covers many acres of ground. At the base of the mother-stem is a stone idol, to which the village women are offering fruits and flowers. Proceeding along the principal street, lined on both sides by mud houses—each having a compound with its mango, guava, plantain, and other trees—and passing by two or three temples of Siva, with their four rows of columns shaded by the branches of large trees, we reach the ryot's cottage at the other end of the village.

The cottage, with its thatched roof and cane or mud walls, wears rather a neat appearance on the outside. Entering through a small door of mango-wood, we step at once into the open yard, round which stand the several huts which form the home of the ryot and his family. On the west side of the yard is the best and biggest of them. Its walls are of great thickness, the straw thatch is more than a cubit deep, the bamboo

framework is well compacted together, and the floor is raised about five feet from the ground. There runs, facing the yard, a verandah, supported by props of palmyra; it is the parlour of the family. The hut is divided into two compartments; the larger one being the sleeping-room of the ryot, whose bedstead and bedding are the mud floor, a mat, and a quilt stuffed with cotton. The smaller compartment is used as a store-room of the family. One small window, high up in the wall towards the street, serves to let in light and air; and the only furniture in the room is a wooden box and a few bamboo-poles stuck into the walls, on which clothes are hung and the bedding is put up in the day-time.

On the other three sides of the yard are the remaining huts, much smaller than the above, comprising a small bed-room, a lumber-room, a kitchen, and a cow-house. About the middle of the yard is the granary, with a conical thatch, containing corn sufficient for the consumption of the family from one harvest to another. Not far from it is the straw-stack, which serves as fodder for cows and oxen for a whole year. Behind the kitchen is the dust-heap, which, though hurtful to health, is necessary to the ryot, as it supplies him with

manure for his lands. Cleanliness and tidiness are not to be found within the cottage. Our ryot has also his little compound, in which grow fruit-trees and vegetable and flower plants. The whole place belongs to him ; all he pays to the zemindar for his homestead is a small yearly ground-rent.

The peasant farmer's family consists of himself, his wife, two grown-up sons who help him in the fields, a daughter about eight years old, his old mother, and an unmarried brother who has his separate lands. There are in the house three milch-cows with their calves, and two bullocks, which, with only one plough, are considered sufficient for the purposes of the ryot, who has about ten acres of land. Besides these there are no other domestic animals in the cottage (pigs and fowls are abomination to the Hindoo peasant) except a dog, which is not much cared for.

Reaching home, the ryot gives us his best mat to sit on. He dares not offer us any cooked food, but spreads before us on a plantain-leaf a few mangoes, bananas, and other fruits fresh culled from his own trees. The food is not sumptuous ; but whatever he offers he gives of free will and a good heart. It is sweet to sit in the shade of the verandah, partaking of his frank hospitality and

conversing with him on his simple topics, while the breeze, stealing through the mango-laden branches and the graceful plantain-leaves, blows full upon us.

The ryot's mode of life is very simple. Taking a little rest, after coming home at the end of his morning's work, he has his bath, and then takes his chief meal of the day, which consists of coarse bread and vegetable curry, or rice and dál, with salt and chillies for condiments. He occasionally takes fish, but never touches meat. He then has a good nap, which lasts till two or three in the afternoon, from which time until sunset he is again employed in the fields; after which he returns home, driving his cattle before him and carrying the slender plough on his shoulder. He then eats his last meal for the day, smokes, and, gossiping the rest of the evening with his family or his friends, retires for the night.

Even in this simple life the ryot has many troubles and anxieties. One of his neighbours is a nasty man, always trying to pick quarrels with him. These the ryot has to submit for settlement to the elected head-man of the village, who acts as a petty magistrate in his own

particular settlement. Or perhaps through pressure of work he has neglected some religious observance; and for this he has to answer before the village Punchâyet, generally a body of five elected members, whence its name. And then he is always dreadfully anxious about his crops. Are the rains going to set in, or will there be drought? How is he to irrigate his parched lands? And if there be too much rain the plant will be drowned and rot; or if the monsoon bursts before the plant is well up and rooted firmly, the crop will suffer. Will he be able to pay his full rent this year? and how will he make up his last year's balance which he could not pay owing to the failure of the spring crop? These anxieties harass the soul of the poor ryot.

Besides, notwithstanding that the zemindar is a just man, the ryot has to meet a number of illegal dues and perquisites exacted by the landowner's petty officials. And then our good man, so self-denying and abstemious, is always getting into the clutches of the money-lender, who, though a good friend to the ryot during the bad season, exacts his usurious interest mercilessly. Sometimes our ryot is very improvident. He spends money in marriages and funerals on a scale

quite disproportionate to his means; and he has to go to the money-lender for that. He is, nevertheless, rarely bankrupt. His general position is that of a poor man obliged to submit to a certain amount of hardship, which is more or less the lot of his compeers all over the world; at the same time he manages to buy silver ornaments for his wife and children, and he is only debarred by caste rules, and not by want of means, from rising in the social scale.

As a rule the ryot works hard. But he works only when he must; and it is for this reason that he is never free from embarrassment. Besides, he is hopelessly ignorant; and, notwithstanding his perfect knowledge of crops and lands, he is so wedded to his old notions and his old implements that it is impossible to get out of him anything that his forefathers did not do. But there is hope for him yet. The great zemindars have become less oppressive; successive rent laws have freed the ryot from the position of a bondsman; he is becoming more and more independent every day. By the security of his personal freedom, the certainty of tenure under definite conditions, and the protection of the produce of his labour, the ryot has acquired

an idea of his own property, depends on his own labour, calculates on his own wants, and husbands his own profits—things of which he had no idea a little while ago.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

A FEW miles distant from a flourishing country-town lives our money-lender, who is reputed to be the richest man in the village, in a house, which is really a collection of thatched cottages, surrounded by a high brick wall, with broken pieces of bottle stuck on its top. He belongs to the trading caste, and has a goldsmith's shop in the town, which is managed entirely by two of his sons, he himself preferring to reside in his village house, wherefrom he conducts his real business—lending money to the husbandmen and others. These, in all cases of pecuniary difficulty (which recur pretty often), run up to him, the man of all men in the village, who helps them on such occasions, and is, notwithstanding his usurious interest, their only

saviour—hence known to them as the Mahájan, or "great man," the common name of the Indian money-lender.

Early one morning, as the gray-haired Mahájan is seated in the verandah of his neat cottage, testing a piece of gold on the touchstone, there enters a man of meek demeanour, with downcast eyes and clasped hands; at whose appearance the money-lender raises his head, and, taking off his spectacles, looks steadily at the man and asks him: "Well, my friend, what brings you back here so soon?"

The humble individual salutes his questioner very low, and, after expressing his infinite gratitude to the Mahájan for his past considerations, begs to inform him that his last crop failed through the scarcity of rains, and, pending the harvesting of the standing crop, he cannot see at all how to make both ends meet.

"But, my dear sir," exclaims the Mahájan, greatly surprised; "you already owe me a large sum of money, and have not paid even the interest yet; how dare you show your face here again? I have not gone to the law courts yet, but you will make me do so soon."

Whereupon the terrified peasant cries in most

piteous tones: "Mr. Mahájan, I throw myself entirely upon your mercy. The landlord's man has been to my place this morning, and swears he will put me and mine out of my cottage at once if I don't pay down the outstanding rent within two hours, and I have not got a farthing with me to buy a bit of food with to keep myself or my family alive. If you will only try me once more. You have got all our ornaments with you; the only thing I can pledge now is the standing crop, and if you will save me once more by lending me twenty rupees on it, I promise to pay all my debt and interest to you as soon I shall have gathered it in. You are my only saviour now."

The conversation goes on in this manner until the money-lender relents. He can only lend the peasant ten rupees at 60 per cent. interest on the mortgage of the whole of his standing crop. The latter looks scared, pleads hard for a few more rupees and at a little less interest, but accepts the terms at last on finding the Mahájan firm and inflexible. The contract is made, the paper signed, and the silver counted out.

The Indian peasantry are, as a rule, always in debt. Many declare that a too heavy assessment of the land and the rigid system of the collection

of revenue are the chief causes of their perpetual poverty; but it must be admitted that the great, if not the greatest, reason why they become the slaves of the money-lenders is that they are recklessly improvident. And as long as they remain so, they must have to submit to the demands of the Mahájans, who alone will advance them any money. However, whatever be the cause of their indebtedness, there is the fact that the Indian husbandmen are always steeped in debt. And the effect of this indebtedness is apparent. No sooner is the crop cut and gathered, than the husbandmen are compelled to sell it at the cheapest rate in the village market—or, according to the agreement with the Mahájans, in their farmyard—in order to be able to pay the rent to the landlord, or the interest, at least, to the money-lender. And it is evident that should this crop fail, they are obliged to resort to the usurious Mahájan again for their bare existence; and thus they live from year's end to year's end in an abject state of poverty and in fear of constant famine.

The cause of Indian wheat often selling in England cheaper than in the Indian market is this —that Indian ryots are obliged to sell their grain in their farmyard to the Mahájans at a much

cheaper rate than that of the neighbouring markets, and this rate of selling the grain on the threshing-floors must be agreed to before the husbandmen can get money from the money-lenders. Indeed, they dare not sell their grain to others more advantageously. Should any tenant, however, do so, he loses all his credit with the Mahájan, who refuses thenceforth to advance him money on any account, which to him means death or emigration, for every Indian ryot, at some time or other, through inclemencies of the weather, or through his inevitable improvidence, is obliged to seek the help of the Mahájan. The latter lays out his money only on the aspect of the whole crop, nearly the whole of which the cultivator must agree to part with before the Mahájan advances him any money. And that the indebted peasant may not surreptitiously sell his grain to any other person at a higher rate, men are employed by the Mahájan to watch the growing crop day and night, and their expenses have to be borne by the cultivator.

The money-lender's rate of interest is abnormally high in India, ranging from 30 to 100 per cent. per annum, and sometimes still higher. He has the reputation of being very niggardly,

rarely bestowing any money on either Brahmins or beggars, or performing any religious ceremony; and in some parts the Mahájan's name even is not pronounced in the morning by any one lest he should be deprived of his dinner that day for thinking of so miserly and exacting a creature as the money-lender. Nevertheless, the Mahájan is a respectable man, honest and upright in his dealings, though often merciless in the exaction of his usurious interest. And he is preferred by the husbandmen to the traders and the Government, for these exercise power and influence by themselves, whereas the Mahájan does so through the law courts, and often deals leniently with them. Besides, none of the parties interested in agriculture—such as landlords, the Government, and traders—assist the cultivators in their time of need. The landlords, who have become mere collectors, exact rent from their tenants almost with the same severity as the Government, and are very often wholly ignorant of their duties and obligations to the poor husbandmen, who naturally take to the Mahájan as their best friend, in the long run, and their only friend in extreme cases.

The system of lending money to the ryots

has been in vogue in India from the earliest times; but latterly, under the British regime, things have not been going in such slipshod fashion as they used to do formerly. In some parts of India a circular is in force that nothing concerning agriculture will be sold in the execution of a decree. But this, instead of doing good, as intended, to the husbandmen, has done them harm, in this, that since the circular order has been issued, the Mahájans have ceased to advance money in a great measure, thus causing the cessation of all agriculture in many tracts of land. And when they do advance money they do so at a great risk, and consequently enhance their already exorbitant rate of interest.

A hasty interference, however well-intentioned, is another cause of trouble to the agriculturists. On account of the passing of a certain Bill in favour of the ryots in Southern India, the Mahájans have totally stopped their money-lending business, and no other agencies have been substituted in their place. Thus the cultivators feel their position more critical and harassing, and the money-lenders cannot stock grain, and sell it to the best advantage. The establishment of agricultural savings' banks is a very good plan, but it is very

doubtful whether the ignorant and unchangeable ryots will ever take kindly to it. Take another example—a district where the Limitation Act is in force. Here a cultivator is willing to pay his Mahájan, but cannot do so within limitation time. The Mahájan is compelled to sue him, and get a decree, for which the ryot will have to bear all the expenses or renew his stamp deed and register it.

Considering all these circumstances, it is hardly probable that the old system of money-lending in India will die out soon. Indeed, if we balance the tyranny of the money-lenders on the one hand, with the assistance they give to the improvident cultivators on the other, when they have no one to look to, it must be said that, enormous as their extortions are, without them the husbandmen would have long ago vanished from the soil of India.

THE BROKER.

IT will probably strike the British merchant as surprising that out of 132,882 men engaged in commerce (in its broadest sense) in one Indian province, 13,111 were put down in the last census as brokers. But it must be remembered that the Dalál, or Indian broker, is omnipresent. It does not matter what you call it—trade, business, charity, worship, festival—wherever money changes hands in India, there is that oily-tongued individual ready to take his commission. The whole number of Daláls in all India would hardly find standing-room in a city like Manchester or Edinburgh.

Any one, especially if he be a stranger, who has ever been in an Indian bazaar, knows the Dalál well enough. Directly you enter it you are besieged by a number of these brokers,

bowing and salaaming, who will offer to show you the best and cheapest shop for everything; and, though you may only want to buy a shilling's-worth of calico or a pair of eighteenpenny slippers, they will stick to you like bees to a honey-pot till you have concluded the bargain. "What will the gentleman have? What is the pleasure of my lord? This humble servant, this grovelling slave can in a minute take him to the best shop in the world, where the people are honest as honesty itself." So runs the tongue of the broker.

You need not consider yourself safe even if you go in a carriage with its doors closed, after giving strict instructions to your coachman to drive fast without taking notice of anybody. Be sure that an exchange of glances and signs took place between the obliging fraternity and the man on the coach-box soon after you started from home. The pace of your horses will slacken, the carriage-doors open gently, and sleek faces thrust themselves into your privacy. If you are an old hand at buying in the bazaars, you of course know that the least hesitation in showing these gentlemen the manlier part of your nature will tell heavily on your peace and purse. But even though you have set the Daláls on their heels as you pass to the shop, you

will find yourself forestalled there by somebody apparently belonging to it, who insinuates his services to you as soon as you open the bargain with the shopkeeper.

In an Indian bazaar it is not unusual to spend an hour in higgling over half-a-dozen of handkerchiefs, after wasting as much time in looking into a dozen shops for the same; and the Daláls would not leave you even if you gave a whole day to finding what you wanted. At least one of them will be at your elbow at the time of bargaining; and the whole fraternity will go shares in the commission, be it only a halfpenny. Of course there is a secret understanding between the brokers and shopkeepers, who communicate with each other in the very presence of the customer. If they find him sharp enough to detect them in their cabalistic language or mysterious signs, the shopkeeper and the broker, putting their right hands under a piece of cloth, let each other know the price they are to put on the yard or the pound by a mere touch of the fingers; the various parts of which represent to them different lengths, weights, and sums of money. No doubt, there are still more ingenious means of communication. If the purchaser be

very particular and will not easily buy anything, the Daláls will leave him alone after showing him every shop. But on buying the article he needs from any shop in the bazaar, on the same or any other day, he will find that the shopkeeper will not sell it to him without adding the commission of the brokers.

The rate of commission differs in every town and in every bazaar. It is usually about a half-penny in the shilling—with the understanding, of course, that the more simple and inexperienced the purchaser is the more he shall be mulcted; the profits of cheating being divided between the merchant and the brokers. In Benares and other places, as many as twenty Daláls will sometimes share the commission on a piece of embroidered cloth. It is said that not very long ago, in Benares, out of each rupee paid by the customer ten annas went into the pockets of the Daláls, while the remaining six annas covered the original value of the article bought and the profit of the seller, which was amply sufficient.

The Daláls have from time immemorial formed themselves into a professional body, and believe that they have a perfect right to come between the two parties in any transaction or

dealing. As a rule they have no capital of their own, and live entirely by their wits. It is not only in the cities and towns that you meet them; you see them in country markets, in villages, among weavers, among peasants, and most of all in the sacred places of the Hindoos. Directly a Hindoo arrives at any of these, he is pounced upon by a number of affable individuals, who, often of the same caste as the priests, and acting in concert with them, will conduct him to the different temples, and advise him as to the presents he should offer to each of the gods. These men are not like the ordinary touts: the gratuity they receive from the visitors counts for nothing with them; their chief resource is a share of the offerings to the gods.

By far the greatest portion of the Indian brokers belong to the mercantile caste. According to the social rules of the tradesmen and merchants, they are bound to help their caste people. In very early times when any member of their caste failed in business, they would get up a subscription and start him afresh, meantime allowing him for his subsistence a small share of their profits. This is the origin of the custom of Dalálee, or commission to brokers.

But latterly the Daláls have become so numerous through increase of population, failures in business, etc., that the prosperous members of the mercantile caste cannot follow their social rules as of old. Nevertheless they feel bound not to refuse any broker a share of the commission. Hence the secret compact between the merchants and the brokers, and hence the abject poverty of a great many of the latter. People of all ages, from fourteen to seventy, many of them in rags, are seen in the class of Daláls. Nevertheless a few brokers, becoming rich by fair or unfair means, have started business on their own account; some have turned money-changers or money-lenders, others have flourished in quite different occupations.

The customs and manners of the brokers' caste in Northern India are peculiar. They affect to rejoice at the death of an old friend or relation, believing that he is gone from a world of suffering to one of perfect happiness; and the more prosperous among them throw out alms while the body is borne away to the burning ghát. As a rule, they are very effeminate and quite incapable of hard work. They are held to be extremely avaricious and niggardly; they are loth to part with even two *cowrees*, or one-tenth

of a farthing. In short, the Daláls of India combine in themselves all the shady characteristics of the gentlemen known in England as "touts," "go-betweens," etc. Indeed, the very name "Dalál" has become in parts of India a by-word for one who lives by cheating his fellow-creatures.

FAIRS.

IN India fairs are always held on some religious pretext. Indeed, the religious fairs, like many other institutions that have come down from very ancient times without undergoing any great change, are a direct result of the formalistic religion of the Hindoos, who fix their time and place according to their sacred writings or traditional customs. They are mostly held on the banks of the rivers which are considered sacred, especially the Ganges and the Jumna, the dipping in whose waters with the accompaniment of a few rites is supposed to purify the heart and lighten the burden of sins of the people who attend them. The end of the Hindoo year, the full moon in certain months, or the unusual conjunction of heavenly bodies, is considered as the most auspicious time for holding the Melá, or

religious fair. The ostensible object of the Melá-goers is of course piety, but that the majority of the persons who congregate there are actuated by quite a different motive, will be apparent to every reader of the following account.

Men and women attired in their best clothes—the latter bedecked with their finest ornaments and jewellery—furnished with bundles of clothes and other requisites, and provided with a respectable amount of cakes and sweetmeats, which were being prepared at home under great excitement for a whole week together, start for the fair a few days before its commencement. The way to it is thronged with people of all sorts and conditions—some on foot, some on horseback, others in vehicles, the last presenting the most bewildering variety, for from the commonest wheelbarrow to the magnificently-equipped bullock-cart, all sorts of describable and indescribable wheeled conveyances are to be seen growling along the main road to the fair. A few camels and elephants also jog along uncomfortably between the heavy vehicles. The gay colours of the dresses and the jingling ornaments of the whispering women, who on this occasion partially dispense with veils and screens, the fresh smiling

faces of the over-dressed children chattering along by the side of their demure parents, the turbans of various hues and shapes, and the loose, flowing garments of the shouting men with heavy sticks and clubs in their hands, the semi-nude beggars ejaculating prayers and clamouring for backsheesh, and the dinning solicitations of the stall-holders lining both sides of the road, together form a scene which is never to be forgotten.

Approaching near the fair the parties halt under topes of mangoes and other trees, which are plentiful in the neighbourhood, and, forming little knots, dot the green patches under them, three or four families often reposing at the base of one large tree. For miles along you see such parties seated on the grass in the outskirts of the fair. Respectable women, who may have hid themselves from the public gaze while on the way, as soon as they reach the place, put away all coverings from their faces, and, alighting from the vehicles in full view of the crowd, saunter up and down with a degree of liberty quite unknown to them in the towns.

This custom, and the fact that men and women worship together in the temple, clearly show that the screening of women from public view was not

originally a Hindoo practice. Even in the villages at the present day, where Mahomedan influence has never reached, or foreign faces are hardly seen, women of all ranks go about unveiled and unescorted from place to place just as freely and unmolested as anywhere in the West. The invasion of the fanatical Moslems brought about the screening and restriction of freedom of Hindoo women; and the forcible seizure by the Islamite conquerors of women—married or single—and their regarding the wife of every strange man as possibly their own, marrying and divorcing being as easy for them as changing their everyday clothes, made the absolute seclusion of women in Indian towns the only security against disgrace and dishonour.

The unusual sight of unveiled women drew at one time to the fairs men in very exalted positions —nobles, and even emperors—who went there in disguise to feast their eyes on the charms of Rajpoot beauties; and at the present time hundreds of people go to the Melás to enjoy the rare chance of contemplating the faces of the handsome women assembled there.

Inside the fair a most curious sight meets our eyes. Shopkeepers and merchants from all parts

of India, and from beyond the frontiers, arriving here first, have settled themselves long before the opening day in the most prominent parts of the place, displaying their various wares in the most attractive way. Nearly every trade is represented here, and every necessity and luxury is to be found within the enclosure—from the most exquisite ivory works to the plainest farthing cakes. The horse-dealer is fraternising with the toy-seller, the rich jeweller having a pleasant chat with the poor sweetmeat-maker, the elegantly-dressed shawl merchant condescendingly talking about business to the shabby basket-maker, the heavy-looking grog-seller drowsily conversing with the quick-eyed little pedlar, the exporter of elephants and the "merchant of old habits" are close friends for the time. Of course, these gentlemen, like others, have come to the fair to clear their hearts of all sins, but they could not help bringing some of their articles, which serve to clear the pockets of the easily-tempted Melá-goers.

Then there are various sorts of fun and amusement going on all over the grounds, which bring together many people who also have the right eye to business and the half of the left eye to piety. And the enjoyment of this fun and amusement,

the most indispensable part of the fair, forms the principal object of the visitors who are not piously or commercially disposed.

The fair commencing, the parties proceed to bathe in the river which runs close to the grounds, leaving some one to look after their property, as there are plenty of thieves about in the place. There are no separate bathing-places for women, but those of the wealthier and higher classes bathe behind walls or in sheds erected for the purpose on the banks of rivers. The bathers, male and female, repeat the name of some god, or mutter some prayer as they stand in the water. The bathing over, they walk to the temple, which is near the ghát, and worship the idol in it for a few minutes. This finishes the sole and whole religious part of the fair.

The visitors then retiring to their sheltering trees take their midday meal, which consists of the victuals brought from home or the sweetmeats purchased on the spot. There are also a few Mahomedan bakers in the place, who sell leavened cakes and meat, which are partaken of only by their co-religionists, the Hindoos being contented with the above simple fare. Taking a little rest after the meal, the men stroll about amusing

themselves, buying toys for their children, or making substantial purchases for themselves or as presents to their friends; whilst most of the women remain under the shady trees, singing songs in dolorous tunes, gossiping and making remarks on the sight-seers, or simply gazing at the motley crowd around them.

This is the harvest time of the gentry of the low brows and the pincers, who are scattered all over the place. The children begin to lose their ornaments, their guardians are eased of their purses, while careless women are quietly relieved of their fineries. Sometimes children get lost in the crowd, and are kidnapped away. The thieves, and the merchants who put high figures on their goods, derive the greatest benefit from a holy fair in India.

On occasions of special fairs, which last for weeks together, the people coming from a long distance often remain there for several days, bathing in the river, and worshipping the idol daily, and making it presents, which go to swell the bags of the presiding priests. At Allahabad, near the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna —a spot highly sacred to the Hindoos—a great Melá is held every year on the full moon in

January, which lasts about two months. This is the greatest religious fair held in India. For miles and miles around, the whole space is then covered with tents and temporary shops, and the grounds of the Melá swarm with people coming from all parts of India—devotees and women-gazers, merchants and mendicants, pilferers and sight-seers, of all classes and religions. The Brahmins of Prayág, the holy city near the confluence, derive a handsome revenue from it; but to their great grief the place of the Melá has been a little removed from the time-honoured site, the gathering of so large a number of men being disallowed since the Mutiny to take place under the immediate ramparts of the fort.

THE FOLK-LORE OF INDIAN BIRDS.

IN India, as elsewhere, the common owl is a bird of ill omen; but a white species is held in high esteem by the Hindoos. The white owl is always supposed to bring good luck; hence it is held sacred to the goddess of prosperity, and the people are pleased when it builds its nest in their houses. In the country these birds often establish their quarters in the darkest nooks and corners of old houses, breeding there generally twice a year and producing five or six young ones at a time; and all their screeching and shrieking is endured for luck's sake. It is considered great good-fortune to get a glimpse of a white owl in the day-time. The crow bears the same evil reputation in India as in other countries; its cry thrice repeated being thought a sure token of

death. But, in some parts, a crow or raven cawing only once on the left of a young woman is held as a sign that her lover is coming to meet her.

The name of the bat is never uttered at night by the common people: the belief being that the utterer would soon lose all his property. In the villages it is believed that if a pregnant woman, sitting on the house-roof, sees a bat flying over her head, she will never be delivered of her child until the same bird passes over her again.

A curious legend about the *chakwá*, or Brahmini duck, is found all over India. For some indiscretion two lovers were turned into Brahmini ducks, and condemned to pass the night apart from each other on the opposite banks of a river. All night long each asks in its turn if it shall join its mate, and the answer is always No. "Chakwá, shall I come?" "No, chakwi." "Chakwi, shall I come?" "No, chakwá." The *chakor*, or Indian red-legged partridge, which is found all over the Himalayas (the hen lays from ten to fifteen eggs), is said to be enamoured of the moon and to eat fire at the full moon—possibly from the fact of its seeming to hover about the moon. The appearance of the *chátak*,

a small bird, is held to presage a good shower of rain; the bird living only on rain-drops, and always crying for them.

The peacock is said to scream and dance with joy at the sound of thunder; and he "dances;' dances on; when he looks down he weeps anon" (at the sight of his ugly feet, they say). The peacock is credited with a strong thievish propensity, as appears from this saying:—"The deer, the monkey, the partridge, and the peacock rob the field of its store." Anything that betrays itself is likened to "a peacock in the thief's house" —a saying founded on the story of a peacock which swallowed a gold necklace brought home by a thief. This bird is sacred to the Hindoo god of beauty, who is represented as riding on it.

The kite, the hawk, and the vulture are all regarded as very unlucky birds. The screeching of the first brings serious misfortune, the sight of the second famine and oppression, and the approach of the third death. By whirling a kite round the head of a Muslim child on a Tuesday or Saturday, and then letting it go, great blessings are ensured to the little one. Fowlers trade on this superstition. Kites sometimes carry off gold ornaments; and Mahomedan women say the reason is because

the young kites will not open their eyes till some gold is placed in the nest: hence the saying, "The philosopher's stone is in the kite's nest."

The half-mythical *Garuda*, a kind of eagle, sometimes called "adjutant," is the mortal enemy of snakes. The legend goes that the mother of Garuda quarrelled with her sister, who was the mother of the snakes, respecting the colour of the horse that was produced at the churning of the ocean; and since that time there has been constant enmity between their descendants. On the occasion of Garuda's marriage, the serpents, alarmed at the thought of his having children who might destroy them, made a fierce attack on him; but he slew them all, save one, which he has since worn as an ornament round his neck. To this day superstitious Hindoos repeat the name of Garuda three times when walking in the fields and before going to sleep at night, as a safeguard against snakes.

The crane is considered to be the most cunning of all birds. It stations itself quietly by a pool, apparently absorbed in meditation till it sees a fish to dart upon. So the word "crane" has become synonymous with "hypocrite, traitor, etc." in Sanskrit and the languages derived from

it. A crane is said to have betrayed the hiding-place of one of the Pándava brothers whose adventures are described in the Sanskrit epic Mahábhárata. The pigeon is thought to be auspicious. Pigeons are carefully reared in houses, which they are believed to preserve from decay. The dove is looked upon as a harbinger of good luck. The sight of a pair of doves by a young married lady, whose husband is away from home, means that he will come back to her soon.

There is a women's saying that the cuckoo's note heard on the right is an excellent omen; and yet the cuckoo is held to be an unlucky bird in most parts of India. The bird *papiyá*, of the parrot species, is said to cry "My eye is going"—from the legend that once a man, seeing many wicked deeds done before his eyes, died uttering these words, and was transformed into the bird. Superstitious people are afraid to do anything wrong before a *papiyá*, lest it should betray them. One little bird bears the curious designation of "the bird of the lost money;" because it seems to utter in a low voice something that means "Oh! have you kept, or I have kept it!" There is a tradition that its first ancestors were a man and

wife, who, having lost all their wealth, died heart-broken, and were transformed into these birds. The country-folk believe that if you jingle money before them they will curse you, believing it to be their own.

THE MATCHMAKER.

IT is well known that amongst the Hindoos the feelings of the young man or the young girl are seldom consulted in matrimonial matters. The usual course is for the parents, when they judge that their son or daughter has arrived at a marriageable age, to engage the services of a professional matchmaker.

The Ghatuck, or matchmaker, is generally a Brahmin of high order—a man of apparent learning, compliant manners, and invariably of great persuasive powers. His disposition is as amiable as his occupation is pleasant. His strength lies in the use of the particular kind of tact and skill necessary for all intermediaries; and he is not much affected by scruples of conscience. Genealogy and pedigree are his speciality. He can repeat everybody's father's,

grandfather's, great-grandfather's names, and so on to the thirteenth generation; and he has at his fingers' ends all about their caste, *gotra* or tribe, their quality and position, and the hundred other details about which the Hindoos are very particular. The Ghatuck has great pretensions to a knowledge of Sanskrit, though on the first test he breaks down. But it does not in the least matter to him. He has a stock of Sanskrit phrases and commonplaces stored up in his memory; and these he delivers in so masterly a fashion that ordinary folk gape at him with wonder.

But it is in his art that his chief merit lies, and not in his knowledge. His occupation is pleasant, but is often very delicate; for when there are many points to be considered there is sure to be some hitch in the negotiations. And then he has to make matters smooth by all the glozing and polishing powers he may possess. You cannot find a more glib or more voluble person. He never hesitates for his answers. His imagination is always ready to make up for any shortcomings of memory or knowledge. He flinches at no exaggeration; and if you throw the slightest doubt on his

veracity, he thunders forth the names of all his deities, and swears by one and all of them that he never utters anything but the barest truth. He tell fibs? he would rather have his tongue cut out. The Ghatuck never finds any fault in his young man or girl. The lady may be as ugly as possible; but he will pass her off as a second Venus.

There comes of a morning our Brahmin Ghatuck to the house of his patron, whose son's marriage he is negotiating. He has a long, thin face, with the *tilac*, or caste-mark, on his high forehead, large round eyes of a calm, meditative cast, though betraying in their corners an unusually sly expression, finely-turned eyebrows, an aquiline nose, and a beardless chin. His placid countenance has a certain charm, and his look inspires respect for his talents and confidence in his abilities. After the usual exchange of salutations the master of the house asks the Ghatuck whether everything is all right, and how he finds the girl; upon which the latter answers in this style:

"Yes, sir, everything is all right. The girl is beautiful as the full moon; even the moon has spots, but she is spotless and peerless. Her teeth

are sparkling like the seeds of a pomegranate; her arch, bright black eyes beat those of Káma (Hindoo Cupid); her voice is sweet like that of the cuckoo; her gait is dignified and graceful like that of an elephant; and, as to her figure, I know nothing to compare it with. She is intelligent like the goddess Saraswatí (Hindoo Minerva), and talks like Lakshmi (the goddess of fortune), and will certainly bring fortune to any family she may be connected with."

With a twinkle in his eye, his patron interrupts him with the question whether the girl really is handsome and intelligent: then the Ghatuck bursts forth: "Rám, Durgá, Hari, Siva, Brahmá, Vishnoo—do you think I am joking with you? A man like me, descended from Brahmá himself, never jokes. *Satyam eva jayate:* truth is ever victorious. Why, sir, you would not find such a perfect match for your noble son in these three worlds. And then the girl's parents are willing to bestow such a lot of things as her dowry!—a whole houseful of things! What can you have better?"

The conversation goes on in this style until the hesitations of the parent are overcome. The matchmaker, well satisfied with his performance,

departs for the house of the lady. There he represents the young man to be beautiful like Kartic (the god of beauty); his manners are those of a nobleman; he is free from all vices; he studies day and night. In short, he is a precious gem—an ornament of his country. To the questions—Whether the young man has passed any University examinations, whether he holds any scholarship, and what degree he has taken, the Ghatuck replies: "He has not passed any examination yet; but what does that matter? Bless his dear soul, he will pass all his examinations in three years; and then his parents are so rich and have promised to give such a mass of priceless ornaments and jewellery!"

Then comes a difficulty on the settlement of the last point; or the mother of the girl grumbles at the boy not having passed any examination yet. Or perhaps somebody has whispered to the young man's mother that the girl's nose is rather chubby. The Ghatuck, well prepared to meet these difficulties, flits backwards and forwards; and after the fullest display of his arts and powers, and a good deal of higgling on both sides, he manages to bring the negotiations to a successful termination.

He is amply paid for his services, though often life-long curses of all the parties concerned form his chief reward. The remuneration of the Ghatuck is not fixed; it depends upon the sort of match he makes, and upon the quality and position of the families he unites. At a middle-class wedding he gets from £2 to £3, besides presents; from rich families he gets about £5, besides presents worth about £10. Some matchmakers have been known to make fortunes and buy estates. If a Ghatuck can secure an educated and well-to-do young man for a poor, common-looking girl he is immensely paid for his services by the parents of that girl. On the contrary, if the bride or bridegroom turns out to be the reverse of what she or he was represented, the Ghatuck has only the few rupees he got before the marriage for all his reward, with a shower of blows from the male members of the family thrown in.

Of late years female matchmakers are taking the place of the male ones in some of the large towns. Having free access to the inner apartments of a house—a privilege their male rivals can never expect to enjoy—they can reach the ladies, who necessarily have a great influence in all marriages. Naturally sharper in wit and more

glib of tongue, their finesse and subtlety have been known to overcome all difficulties where their male competitors have failed.

These matchmakers sometimes do great mischief. If unsatisfied with their promised reward, or through professional jealousy, they will contrive to break a match. It is their business to fabricate, and this they can do either way. Nevertheless the professional matchmakers of India will continue to ply their trade as long as the present system of marriage lasts in that country.

INFANT MARRIAGE.

AMONGST the Hindoos marriage is managed entirely by the parents. Courtship is literally unknown in India, and the persons who are united in wedlock remain perfect strangers to each other till their nuptial day, and often for a long period afterwards. Everything is settled to suit the fancies or caprices of the parents. To the parties chiefly concerned marriage is a pure lottery; but, fortunately, Hindoo connubial life is not generally a miserable lot, as the wife is unsurpassed in faithfulness and devotion to her husband.

Hindoo legislators insist on the marriage of a girl before she attains the age of puberty, and as that seldom takes place in India later than the twelfth year, the highest age at which a Hindoo girl is married—with rare exceptions—

is eleven years. The bridegroom is in his teens and the bride has hardly seen ten summers when they are united for life. Many girls have been married when they have barely learned to feed themselves, and sometimes they become mothers before they attain their eleventh year.

The boy inmate of a Hindoo house finds himself betrothed by his father's or grandfather's command to some girl—perhaps an infant of six or seven years old, whom he has not seen; nor does he see her till at the age of fifteen or thereabouts. Whilst he is yet at school he is sent out to fetch her home to his mother's or grandmother's zenana. There the child-wife takes the lowest place, and becomes at once the toy and slave of all the women. She has to learn her domestic duties under the strict eye of her mother-in-law, and drudges on; unless, indeed (as is generally the case), there is a widow in the family to have all the work heaped upon her: for a Hindoo widow is the cursed of gods and men. However, even if this be the case, the child-wife must learn to do her work, which is often menial, and must absolutely obey her mother-in-law. The husband and wife pass

their lives in two almost entirely different tracks, and are brought up in ideas and associations widely different from each other.

Beginning as wife at so early an age, and entering by the door of marriage-ceremonies which may not be spoken of—revealing possibly to the immature mind thoughts which should never have been present to it—the little girl passes from infancy into the duties and trials of mature life, or at any rate into the seclusion and imprisonment which are the grave of childhood. This dreary life-doom is appalling and most inconceivable to English readers. There is no divorce in the Hindoo law; and, even when she is cruelly treated or mercilessly neglected, the Hindoo wife patiently submits. Still the only thought occupying her mind is the welfare of her husband, whose wrongs and injustices she religiously forgives.

Yet this cruel treatment from her husband is preferable to widowhood. The Hindoo widow is never allowed to marry again. She has no one on whom to rely; she is subject to unkindness from every one, and is liable to be driven to despair. She has to put on the plainest

dress, to live only on vegetables and fruits, frequently to abstain from all food, to use no articles of luxury. She is expected to harbour no cheerful thoughts—to pass her life immured within the four walls of the zenana, with grief for her only companion. Thus the widow drags through her wretched life till welcome death comes and relieves her. It often happens that a Hindoo wife loses her husband soon after her marriage; and then she is initiated into the horrors of a widow's life ere she has passed her girlhood. An old man of sixty will not scruple to marry a girl of eight; though he knows she will be an outcast in his house all her life after she has been deprived of her husband. Out of the total population of India there must at least be six millions of women suffering in this way. The last census of Calcutta shows that there are 55,000 widows in that city.

The more enlightened natives of India are strongly in favour of the abolition of infant marriage and the introduction of widow marriage; but the enlightened are very few, and custom is omnipotent in that land. There are many who talk about these things and even feel for the

poor girls; but, slaves of custom as my countrymen are, they stop short at talking for fear of being outcasted. I personally know a case which well illustrates this. A friend of mine had to go on service for two or three years to the frontiers, leaving his daughter, about nine years old, under the care of his father, whom he begged not to marry his little daughter till he came back home. My friend's father is a very educated man and holds a distinguished position in one of the chief towns; but, notwithstanding the entreaties and instructions of his son, he married the child to an ignorant boor directly she passed her ninth year.

A body of my countrymen are clamouring for political privileges, whilst they take no heed of these curses of Hindoo society. They ignore the social condition altogether. I say, first improve the man, then the society, and then see to the political condition of that society. The only improvement that has taken place in respect of marriage is amongst the Brahmos, the new theistic body in India, who do not marry their girls before they attain their fourteenth year, and who have also introduced the marriage of widows. But their head, the late Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen,

married his daughter when she was only a little over thirteen years of age to the Maharajah of Cooch Behar. For this breach of faith he was severely blamed by all his educated countrymen, and the whole of the native press turned against him.

THE HINDOO WIDOW.*

THERE is hardly a class of living beings whose wretched condition appeals more strongly to the humane feelings of charitably disposed persons, and in whose woeful state there is more scope for the display of philanthropic efforts, than the widows among the Hindoos in India. Very few people in Europe have even the remotest idea of the miseries and horrors which Hindoo women undergo after the death of their husbands. The Hindoos themselves do not fully know the sufferings of their widowed sisters and daughters, much less do they care to alleviate the hardships of their bereaved countrywomen, or to improve the general status of the female population of India.

It is a hopeful sign of the times that many

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benevolent Englishmen in England and in India and the few enlightened Hindoos are now devoting their attention to the improvement of the condition of women in the latter country. Schools have been opened to teach young girls the rudiments of knowledge, zenana teachers have been appointed to give lessons in the common branches of learning to women at their own homes, and medical ladies have been taken from England to treat ailing Hindoo women, who would not be treated by medical men. All this, and much more, has been done to make the life of an Indian woman more comfortable and happy than before; but up to this time the miseries and hardships of Hindoo widows have been almost overlooked. The cries of the hapless creatures who are doomed to life-long widowhood hardly find an echo beyond the four walls of the Indian zenana.

It is certain that the prohibition of the marriage of Hindoo widows has from a very ancient time been prevalent in India. The great Hindoo lawgiver Manu, who flourished about five centuries B.C., enjoins the following duty on widows: "Let her emaciate her body by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots, and fruits; but let her not, when her lord is deceased, even pronounce the

name of another man. Let her continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding every sensual pleasure, and cheerfully practising the incomparable rules of virtue which have been followed by such women as were devoted to only one husband. A virtuous wife ascends to heaven, if, after the decease of her lord, she devotes herself to pious austerity; but a widow who slights her deceased husband by marrying again, brings disgrace on herself here below, and shall be excluded from the seat of her lord."

Whether the Vedas (the Hindoo scriptures) and the Vedic commentaries expressly lay down that a widow after the death of her husband must not marry again, has been disputed by many a modern Pandit; but it is clear from the above quotation that the cruel custom has reigned supreme in India since the time of Manu, whose injunctions have been literally obeyed by all Hindoos. And as time passed on the merciless law of Manu has not only been rigorously carried out, but its evil effects have been immensely aggravated by many additional and not less cruel customs imposed upon the widows by the priestly class in India, which is, *par excellence*,

the land of customs and ceremonies. Even Manu would have shrunk from making so inhuman a law, had he known that it would be so barbarously abused, and would be the source of the unutterable sufferings and heart-breaking woes to which Hindoo widows are in modern times subjected.

The evils of widowhood in India are manifold, and the system of early marriage makes them tenfold intense. Among the Hindoos a boy, who is hardly out of his teens, is married to a girl who has barely passed twelve summers; and it often happens that a wife loses her husband soon after her marriage, and then she is initiated in the horrors of a widow's life ere she has passed her very girlhood. Even if the would-be husband, after the formal engagement has been made, dies before the ceremony of marriage, the girl is condemned to widowhood for all her life. The mischievous tendency of Manu's law is then at once perceived. Notwithstanding the watchfulness of their elders, the restrictions of the zenana system, and the inculcations of doctrines of moral purity in life and manners, many young widows yield to the irresistible impulse of passion. Do what you will you cannot conquer nature; and the utter futility of man's efforts to beat nature has been

proved over and over again by the numerous instances of deviation from the path of virtue, and its attendant vices and crimes, among the widows in India. It is difficult to say whether the existing system is more cruel than pernicious, but that its extreme hardships give rise to much of the degradation and corruption of female society in India will be apparent to every reader of the following pages.

A Hindoo woman's period of temporal happiness ceases, irrespective of her rank or wealth, directly she becomes a widow. When a young man dies, his parents and friends are in deep mourning for him, expressing the greatest grief for his untimely loss; but few people understand or care to comprehend the utter wretchedness in which he leaves his young wife, who is yet too tender and inexperienced to bear even the commonest hardship of this world. No sooner has the husband breathed his last than the young wife is made to give up all tokens of the married state, and to forego all pleasures and luxuries as utterly unsuitable for her present condition. The iron bangle round her wrist, and the red powder on the parting of her hair, which she so proudly wore but a few days ago, she must now give

up for ever. The ornaments which were never off her person during her husband's lifetime, she herself removes one by one from her limbs and puts them away, unless somebody else, without taking any heed of her grief-stricken heart, snatches them off her body. Fine or attractive clothes she must not wear, she has to be contented with a plain, simple, white *sári*. The very appearance which her bereaved and helpless condition presents would make you stand aghast. It is hardly possible even to recognise her now, who, only a few days ago, was radiant with her youthful bloom, and glittering with her picturesque costume and brilliant ornaments. The most outrageous customs are imposed on her, and she must observe them or lose her caste, which, among the Hindoos, virtually amounts to losing her life. Alas! the custom of man is more cruel than the decree of Providence.

I shall give, as far as possible, an exact description of the actual state to which a Hindoo woman is reduced after the death of her husband; and as some people assert that the widows in Bengal are not ill-treated at all, I shall first put forward the milder case, and then endeavour to sketch the horrors of Hindoo widowhood in the

heart of Hindooism, the North-West Provinces of India.

The formal period of mourning for a widow in Bengal lasts for one month with the Káyasths, the most numerous and influential class in that part of India—the Brahmins keeping only ten days. During this time she has to prepare her own food, confining herself to a single meal a day, which consists of boiled coarse rice, simplest vegetables, *ghee* or clarified butter, and milk; she can on no account touch meat, fish, eggs, or any delicacy at all. She is forbidden to do her hair and to put any scent or oil on her body. She must put on the same cotton *sári* day and night even when it is wet, and must eschew the pleasure of a bed and lie down on bare ground, or perhaps on a coarse blanket spread on it; in some cases she cannot even have her hair dried in the sun after her daily morning ablution, which she must go through before she can put a particle of food in her mouth. The old women say that the soul of a man after his death ascends to heaven quickly and pleasantly in proportion to the bodily inflictions which his wife can undergo in the month after the death of her husband. Consequently the new-made widow, if not for

any other reason, at least for the benefit of the soul of her departed husband, must submit to continuous abstinence and excruciating self-inflictions.

A whole month passes in this state of semi-starvation; the funeral ceremonies, which drag on till the end of that period, are all performed, and the rigid observances of the widow are a little relaxed, if it may be so termed, since the only relaxation allowed to her is that she need not prepare the food with her own hands, and that she can change her clothes, but always using only plain cotton *sáris*. The real misery of the widow, however, begins after the first month. It is not enough that she is quite heart-broken for her deceased husband, and that she undergoes all the above-mentioned bodily privations, she must also continually bear the most galling indignities and the most humiliating self-sacrifices. She cannot take an active part in any religious or social ceremony. If there be a wedding in the house, the widow must not touch or in any way interfere with the articles that are used to keep the curious marriage customs. During the *poojahs*, or religious festivals, she is but grudgingly allowed to approach near the object of veneration,

and in some bigoted families the contact of a widow is supposed to pollute the materials requisite for the performance of marriage ceremonies.

The widow is, in fact, looked upon as the "evil one" of the house. If she has no son or daughter to comfort her, or if she has to pass her whole life, as is often the case, with her husband's family, her condition truly becomes a helpless one. During any ceremony or grand occasion she has silently to look on, others around her enjoying and disporting themselves; and if some kind relation does not come to relieve her tedium, she has hardly anything else to do but to ruminate on her present sad, wretched condition. Every female member of a family, whether married or unmarried, can go to parties, but a widow cannot; and if she expresses any wish to join the family on such occasions it is instantly repressed by the curt rebuke of her mother-in-law, or some other relation, that "she is a widow, and she must not have such wishes."

The most severely felt injunction of custom upon the widows is that of fasting for two days every month during the whole period of her widowhood, that is, till the last month of her

life. This observance is called *ekádasí*, which is a Sanskrit word meaning "the eleventh," so called from the fact that the widow abstains from all food on the eleventh day of each of the two fortnights into which the Hindoo lunar month is divided. This *ekádasí* is a strict fast, nothing in the shape of liquid or solid can be touched by the widow; even a drop of water is forbidden to her for the whole of twenty-four hours on those two days of the month. There is no trace of this stringent rule anywhere in the Vedas or in the ancient literature of the Hindoos. As I have shown above, Manu enjoins a system of frequent abstinence, but nowhere in the Hindoo books of old on laws and observances is it ordained that a Hindoo widow must pass two days in every month without touching, even at the risk of her life, any food or water. It is an innovation of later date, as are a great many of the present customs and ceremonies observed by the natives of India.

Under the joint family system of the natives of India there are very few Hindoo houses where either a widowed daughter or daughter-in-law cannot be found, and the sufferings of these young widows on their *ekádasí* days are

simply beyond description. In the middle of the fasting day you will find the young widowed daughter writhing in agony of thirst and hunger, her aged mother sitting silently by her and shedding tears at the pangs of her bereaved child, who cannot, for fear of shame and ridicule, even give vent to her feelings by the only way left to her—by weeping; her face is deathly pale through want of food, her eyes are bleared with racking pain, and her lips parched with terrible thirst. Perhaps she hears the noise of dropping water; she at once turns her eyes towards it, she looks hard at it, but she dares not utter a word. She longingly watches the course of the water as it reaches the courtyard; a dog passes by and drinks of it, but she cannot touch it. She draws away her eyes from it and mutters to herself, "Oh! what sin have we committed that God has made us widows even worse than dogs?" She casts a look of despair at her mother. But the mother is helpless. The ordinances of custom must be rigidly followed. Her heart breaks at the sight of her daughter's agonies, but the rules of *Shástras* cannot be broken. They say that it is written in the *Shástras* that the widow who drinks water (not

to speak of taking any food) and the person who gives her water on the day of *ekádasí*, are both damned to eternal perdition. The timidly superstitious Hindoo mother cannot dare the risk of the perpetual condemnation of her soul to hell for the sake of alleviating the sufferings of her widowed daughter.

In many houses you will see an aged, invalid widow, lying down prostrate on her fasting day, haggard and emaciated, her daughters sitting around her. It is the middle of Indian summer, everything is blazing with torpid heat. The poor widow can hardly get up through age and illness, and there on so scorching a day she goes through her fast without touching a particle of food or a drop of water. The daughters are trying their best to soothe and comfort her, but she lies almost in an insensible state. All at once her eyes open, she looks hard at one of her daughters and most beseechingly asks for a little water. They look at her helplessly and tell her—"Dear mother, to-day is *ekádasí*, water is forbidden." The wretched widow is in a state of delirium, she has lost her memory. Again and again she implores her daughters for a drop of water, saying, "I am dying, pray give me water." They

cannot bear this sight any more, they burst into tears—but they dare not grant their mother's prayer; they only try to comfort her by saying that directly the night passes away she shall have water. But, alas! the night may not pass away for the widow; perhaps she succumbs to her mortal thirst in a few hours, and thus dies a victim to the custom of man.

The widows of Bengal, notwithstanding the barbarous custom which imposes on them such miseries and inflictions, are not purposely ill-treated by their relations and friends; on the contrary, in respectable families they are greatly pitied and comforted in their state of abject wretchedness and despair. Widows of a mature age are very much respected, and though they cannot take an equal share with others in certain festivals and ceremonies, their counsel and criticism are earnestly sought for in all important domestic events, and very often they personally superintend the household affairs of everyday life as well as on grand occasions.

In Bengal it is not the treatment of relations and friends that the widow suffers from; it is the cruel custom of the land, which is more obligatory on her than the most stringent written law,

and which binds her down to a continuous course of privations and self-inflictions. A distinguished Bengali gentleman, the Rev. Lal Behari Dey, says on this point: "There are, no doubt, exceptional cases; but, as a general rule, Hindoo widows are not only not ill-treated, but they meet with a vast deal of sympathy. Old widows in a Bengali Hindoo family are often the guides and counsellors of those who style themselves the lords of creation. We had the happiness of being acquainted with a venerable old Hindoo widow who was not only the mistress of her own house, consisting of a considerable number of middle-aged men and women, but she was often the referee of important disputes in the village of which she was an inhabitant, and her decisions were received with the highest respect." This description is quite true, and we ourselves know of many cases of great respect shown to old widows; but a person may be respected and venerated, and at the same time she may, especially in a land of superstitions and prejudices like India, be continually harrowed by the most merciless mental and bodily torments.

In the North-West Provinces of India widows suffer treatment far worse than that to which their

sisters in Bengal are subjected. The heartless customs are strictly enforced among all the castes, but as you ascend to the more well-to-do and richer classes they assume a more relentless and virulent form.

A widow among the respectable classes in this land of rigid Hindooism is considered and treated as something worse than the meanest criminal in the world. Directly after the death of her husband she is shunned by her relations and friends, and, as if her breath or touch would spread among them the contagion of her crime—the natural death of her husband—they do not even approach near her, but send the barbers' wives, who play an important part in all Hindoo ceremonies, to divest her of all her ornaments and fineries. These mercenary persons often proceed to their task in a most heart-rending manner; but that is the command of their mistresses, and they must obey it. No sooner has the husband breathed his last, than these hirelings rush at their victim and snatch off her ear-rings and nose-rings.

"Ornaments plaited into the hair are torn away, and if the arms are covered with gold and silver bracelets, they do not take the time to draw them off one by one, but, holding her arm on the

ground, they hammer with a stone until the metal, often solid and heavy, breaks in two; it matters not to them how many wounds are inflicted. Neither if the widow is but a child of six or seven, who does not know what a husband means, they have no pity."

At the funeral the relatives of the deceased, male and female, accompany the corpse, and all, rich or poor, must go on foot. The men lead the procession, the women, with thick veils drawn over their faces, following, and last comes the widow, preceded by the barbers' wives, who take great care to keep her at a respectable distance from the main body of the mourners, shouting out as they go along to warn the other people of the approach of the detested widow. Thus she is dragged along, wild with grief, aghast at the indignities heaped upon her, her eyes full of bitter tears, mortally afraid to utter a single syllable, lest she should receive a more heartless treatment from the very people who but a few days ago held her so dearly.

Soon after the party reaches the river or tank, near which the cremation takes place, the widow is pushed into the water, and there she has to remain in her wet clothes, away from all the other

people, until the dead body has been burnt to ashes—a process occupying, in India, several hours—and the whole company have performed their necessary ablutions. And when all of them have started for home, the widow is led along by the barbers' wives, her clothes soaking wet, and she mutely bearing the rudeness of her barbarous guides. This custom is rigidly observed in all seasons and all circumstances. It matters not whether she has been laid up with fever or suffering from consumption, whether she is scorched by the burning rays of the mid-day sun of Indian summer or frozen by the piercing winds blowing from the Himalayas in winter, the widow must be dragged with the funeral party in the preceding manner. There is no pity for her. It sometimes happens that if she is of delicate health she breaks down in the middle of her journey, and falls dead. And death is her best friend then.

When she returns home, she must sit or lie in a corner on the bare ground, in the same clothes, wet or dry, which she wore at the time of her husband's death. There she has to pass her days of mourning unattended by anybody, except perhaps by one of the barbers' wives, who, if not well paid, does not care to give her kind

offices to the widow. She must be content with only one very scanty and plain meal a day, and must often completely abstain from all food and drink. Her nearest and dearest relations and friends shun her presence as if she were an accursed viper, and if ever they approach near her it is only to add fresh indignities to her miserable lot. They make her the butt of the vilest abuses and the most stinging aspersions. She is a widow, and she must put up with her lot; and thus she drags on her miserable existence, with no ray of comfort to cheer her sad soul, and no spark of pity to lighten her heavy heart. Hope, that comes to all, comes not to her.

On the thirteenth day after the funeral the widow is allowed, after necessary ablutions, to change the clothes that she has worn since her husband's death. Her relatives then make her presents of a few rupees, which are intended as a provision for life for her, but which are often taken possession of and spent in quite a different way by some male relative. The Brahmins, who have been continually demanding money from her ever since she became a widow, come again at this stage, and make fresh requests for money for services which they have not rendered. Her

head, which was covered with black, glossy hair only the other day, is completely shaved, and the Brahmins and the barbers' wives have to be paid their gratuities for this cruel ceremony.

But even then the wretched woman has no respite. Six weeks after her husband's death the widow has again to wear those clothes—the very sight of which sends a shudder through her inmost soul—which she had put on for the first thirteen days. She can change them only on one condition, that she must go on a pilgrimage to the holy river Ganges (which is often impossible on account of the distance), and perform ablutions in its purifying waters. After that she has to wear the plainest cotton dress, and live on the simplest single meal a day, only varied with frequent fasts.

The year of mourning, or rather the first year of her lifelong mourning, thus slowly passes away. If she happens to live with her own parents, and if they be tenderly disposed towards her, her miseries are a little lightened by their solicitude for her health and comfort. She is sometimes allowed to wear her ornaments again. The kind mother cannot perhaps bear the sight of her daughter's bare limbs, while she herself

wears ornaments and jewels. Kind mother indeed! She cannot bear to see her daughter without ornaments about her body, but she can bear to see her soul crushed with the curse of lifelong widowhood. The very kindness of the mother often turns into the bitterest gall for the daughter. For many fond parents by thus encouraging their young widowed daughters to wear ornaments and fineries, and to indulge in little luxuries, have paved the way for their future degradation and ruin. For a young widow it is but an easy step from little luxuries to fanciful desires, and how many young, neglected, uneducated, and inexperienced women can restrain their natural instincts?

The widow, who has no parents, has to pass her whole life under the roof of her father-in-law, and then she knows no comfort whatever. She has to meet from her late husband's relations only unkind looks and unjust reproaches. She has to work like a slave, and for the reward of all her drudgery she only receives hatred and abhorrence from her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. If there is any disorder in the domestic arrangements of the family, the widow is blamed and

cursed for it. Amongst Hindoos, women cannot inherit any paternal property, and if a widow is left any property by her husband she cannot call it her own. All her wealth belongs to her son, if she has any, and if she has nobody to inherit it, she is made to adopt an heir, and give him all her property directly he comes of age, and herself live on a bare allowance granted by him. Even death cannot save a widow from indignities. For when a wife dies she is burnt in the clothes she had on, but a widow's corpse is covered with a coarse white cloth, and there is little ceremony at her funeral.

I cannot conclude this description of the treatment of Hindoo widows in the North-West Provinces of India without quoting some of the burning words of one of them, which were translated by an English lady and published in the *Journal of the National Indian Association* for November, 1881:

"Why do the widows of India suffer so? Not for religion or piety. It is not written in our ancient books, in any of the *Shástras* or *Mahábhárata*. None of them has a sign of this suffering. What Pandit has brought it upon us? Alas!

that all hope is taken from us! We have not sinned, then why are thorns instead of flowers given us?

"Thousands of us die, but more live. I saw a woman die, one of my own cousins. She had been ill before her husband's death; when he died she was too weak and ill to be dragged to the river. She was in a burning fever; her mother-in-law called a water-carrier, and had four large skins of water poured over her as she lay on the ground where she had been thrown from her bed when her husband died. The chill of death came upon her, and in eight hours she breathed her last. Every one praised her, and said she died for love of her husband.

"I knew another woman who did not love her husband, for all their friends knew they quarrelled so much that they could not live together. The husband died, and when the news was brought the widow threw herself from the roof and died. She could not bear the thought of the degradation that must follow. She was praised by all. A book full of such instances might be written.

"The only difference for us since *satí* was abolished is, that we then died quickly if cruelly,

but now we die all our lives in lingering pain. We are aghast at the great number of widows. How is it that there are so many? The answer is this, that if an article is constantly supplied and never used up it must accumulate. So it is with widows; nearly every man who dies leaves one, often more; though thousands die, more live on.

"The English have abolished *satí;* but, alas! neither the English nor the angels know what goes on in our houses, and Hindoos not only don't care but think it good!"

And well might she exclaim that "neither the English nor the angels know what goes on in our houses, and Hindoos not only don't care but think it good;" for, Hindoo as I am, I can vouch for her statement that very few Hindoos have a fair knowledge of the actual sufferings of the widows among them, and fewer still care to know the evils and horrors of the barbarous custom which victimises their own sisters and daughters in so ruthless a manner; nay, on the contrary, the majority of the orthodox Hindoos consider the practice to be good and salutary. Only the Hindoo widows know their own sufferings; it is perfectly impossible for any other mortal or even

"the angels," as the widow says, to realise them. One can easily imagine how hard the widow's lot must be in the upper provinces of India, when to the continuous course of fastings, self-inflictions, and humiliations is added the galling ill-treatment which she receives from her own relations and friends.

To a Hindoo widow death is a thousand times more welcome than her miserable existence. It is no doubt this feeling that drove, in former times, many widows to immolate themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. Thanks to the generosity of the British Government this inhuman practice of *satí*, or the self-immolation of widows, has now been completely abolished in India. There is only one thing to be said on this point, and that is that the British Government lopped off the outward and more flagrant part of the pernicious system, but did not strike at the hidden root of it.

The English have done many good things, they can do more. They need not, by passing laws or issuing public proclamations, directly interfere with the domestic customs of the Hindoos; but they can make their influence bear indirectly upon the enlightened heads among

the natives of India, and, by the steady infusion of the spirit of European culture and refinement, bring about the elevation of Hindoo women and further the progress of the country at large. The English, by the peculiar position they enjoy in India, possess a distinct vantage-ground from which they can exert great influence on everything appertaining to the Hindoos. Besides, the natives themselves are, under the benign influence of English education, awakening to the horrors of their vicious system. They have already begun the forward movement; all that they want is a sympathetic and effective impulse from outside to push them on in their course of improvement.

FUNERAL CEREMONIES.

THE Hindoos, who burn their dead, conclude their period of mourning with certain ceremonies and festivities in honour of the deceased, which are hence called the Srádh—meaning "anything done to show respect." The Brahmins, the highest of the four Indian castes, mourn for ten days; the Káyasths, the most progressive people, for thirty-one days.

During this period the deceased's family are considered unclean, with whom their relations and friends will not eat; they themselves abstaining from certain kinds of food, especially animal food. The son, who lives a very austere mode of life, must not shave, nor wear shoes, shirts, or any other dress except a piece of white cloth—white being the mourning colour with the Hindoos; and he must content himself with a single meal

a day, consisting only of simple vegetables and fruits, taking a little milk in the evening. This rigid abstinence is intended as a mark of sorrow and respect for the departed father.

A few days before the Srádh, the son, accompanied by a Brahmin and a servant, walks barefooted to the houses of his relations and friends, to whom he announces the approaching ceremony and requests the honour of their presence at his place on that occasion. On the previous day the male members of the deceased's family put on new clothes, after shaving the beard and trimming the hair and the nails, which have been left growing; and formal invitations are sent round to the kinsfolk and acquaintances, asking them to be present at the assembly on the Srádh morning, and at the banquets on the following day or days.

The grand day comes at last. The house presents an animated appearance even before the daybreak, when the son, accompanied by the officiating priest, sets out for the holy River Ganges, where he performs his ablutions and the attendant rites. Meantime the guests arrive, taking their seats on the spacious courtyard of the house, over which carpets are spread, with a thick awning overhead as a protection against

the scorching rays of the Indian sun. Returning home, the son seats himself among the assembled guests, who puff away at the hookahs served by the domestics; the ladies, who come in palanquins, being conducted to the inner apartments. On one side of the courtyard are spread the innumerable presents which the host gives away to Brahmins and Pandits—silver and brass plates and utensils of all kinds, shawls, pieces of broadcloth, rupees, even cots and bedding; on the other side are grouped bands of musicians and singers, who regale the party with their varied performances, which are often far from melodious and soothing, as the noise of the tom-toms and some other instruments is simply deafening.

In the intervals fierce discussions on various subjects are carried on among the Pandits, or learned men; which is, perhaps, the most interesting sight during the whole day. Nothing comes amiss to these gentlemen—grammar, logic, metaphysics, theology, poetry, all equally supply points of warm dispute to them, who, seeming to forget for the time their earthly existence, soar in the lofty regions of imagination and transcendentalism. In the heat of the debate all the rules of civility and decorum are

forgotten. The learned Pandits, from their high flights in abstruse metaphysics and theology, drop down into an indiscriminate abuse of one another, till at last the philosophical controversy finishes in a fight of the fists. Especially is this the case when the disputants happen to be evenly matched in learning and reputation, and when the bone of contention is a subtle argument in logic or an exceptional point in Sanskrit grammar.

A curious ceremony, called "The Distribution of Garlands," is performed as soon as the "father" of the party, who is a man of recognised learning and position, reaches the place, the whole assembly rising at his appearance. Garlands of fresh-culled flowers are distributed among the multitude according to the precedence of rank; the Brahmins receiving them first, followed by the other guests. The people of the highest caste are then offered presents of money and articles, the largest share falling to the family priest. This brings to a close the ceremonies of the day.

The following two days are given over to feastings. The gentlemen of the priestly caste are treated on the first day, who, before they

depart, pocket fresh presents of money. Great care and magnificence mark the banquets, not the least striking feature of which is the extraordinary noise, confusion, and tumult which attend them. The invited guests often do not wait for the announcement of the dinner, but take possession by storm, as it were, of the prepared seats. Shouting and gesticulating, accompanied by inordinate cries for an extra quantity of the delicacies, distinguish a Srádh feast. It must be noted, however, that wines or spirits do not contribute to this excitement and uproar, as no intoxicating liquors are served out at Hindoo banquets—at least at those which are conducted in the old fashion. During these two days an immense number of beggars, professional and non-professional, besiege the door of the Srádh house, who, after being treated with the remnants of the feasts, are dismissed with gifts of coppers or eatables.

The third day puts the finishing touch to the affair. In the morning the musicians entertain their family and their friends with select pieces of music adapted to the solemn occasion. The music over, the son and some of his nearest relatives carry away on their shoulders a huge

painted log of wood, with the figure of an ox carved at the top, depositing it in an appointed spot a little way from the house. Returning home after the necessary ablutions, they partake of a specially prepared dinner, when, for the first time after his father's death, the son eats with his relations and friends. This finishes the period of mourning, after which he, changing his dress, reverts to his former mode of living.

These Srádh ceremonies and banquets are a very costly affair. To satisfy the curiosity of the reader, I shall give a little information on this point, in a few well-known cases. The first and most celebrated Srádh, of which the facts are accurately known, was that performed by Dewan Gobind Sett, at his mother's death, about a hundred years ago. It is said that the Dewan, who was the prime minister of a great rajah, invited so enormous a number of people on the occasion, that to make provision for their dinner he had reservoirs dug near his mansion, which were filled with *ghee*, or clarified butter, and oil, and large plots of ground prepared, whereon were heaped up flour, rice, pulses, and other articles of food. Some of the invited Pandits received, as presents, as much as one

thousand rupees, or about one hundred pounds, each in cash, and gold and silver articles besides. The total expenses of this Srádh have been estimated at about one hundred thousand pounds. The late Rajah Rajkrishna Bahadur, of Calcutta, spent nearly fifty thousand pounds at the funeral ceremony in honour of his illustrious father, the Rajah Nabakrishna. He gave away upwards of two lacs of rupees, or twenty thousand pounds, to the poor only, besides the gratuities to the Brahmins, which were very heavy. A modern rich family will spend quite as much as twenty thousand pounds at a funeral ceremony; and no respectable gentleman feels contented unless he can spend from five hundred to two thousand pounds on a Srádh.

I shall mention one or two more curious ceremonies that are observed during the period of mourning in some parts of India. Some Hindoos observe what is called *brishotsarg*—literally, the giving away of a bull. In this a pair of calves are married with one or two rites. The male calf is first branded on the hinder parts with certain marks, and then allowed to go where he likes. This is the animal that, in course of time,

becomes fat and furious, and is called a *sacred bull.* A facetious gentleman remarks on this point: "As these animals sometimes get troublesome and dangerous to the public, it would not be a bad plan to have them registered in the magistrate's court by the parties who let them loose, and hold them responsible for the mischief that they might do." I must confess that there is great appositeness in this remark. The female calf is presented to the Mahá Brahmin (literally, the Great Brahmin), the man who presides at the cremation. The party then cook rice and milk in sixteen different places, making sixteen balls of the cooked product. A small altar is made, upon which the balls are placed as the officiating priests mutter *mantras*, or incantations, and drawl out sacred verses. Some curious stuffs having been put on the balls, an incense of *ghee*, or clarified butter, is burnt, and a lighted lamp and a small pot full of water are placed before them. These are meant for the satisfaction of the appetite of the departed spirit.

Subsequent to this operation, rice and milk are again cooked, this time in two different places. Out of one of these two compounds one

ball is made for the deceased; and of the other, three, of which one is intended for the grandfather of the son, or of the individual who set fire to the funeral pile, another for his great-grandfather, and the third for his great-great-grandfather. These balls, afterwards purified by an ablution in unpolluted water, which is poured over them, receive an offering of sandal, rice, *toolshee* (a sacred plant), flowers, food, clothes, and money, which, of course, fill up the ever-ready pockets of the Brahmin priests. The proper performance of this ceremony is supposed to admit the departed spirit into the society of his ancestors. Then the man who set fire to the funeral pile gives a present to the Mahá Brahmin, who blesses him. After this the Pandit burns incense in the house of the deceased; the chief mourner, then putting on his full dress, salutes his relations and friends.

From the ámávas, or the end of the moonlit fortnight, of the month of mourning, on every such day thirty jugs of water are offered to a peepul tree, which is considered sacred. On the twelfth ámávas the party give a dinner to twelve Brahmins, making them presents of brass vessels and clothes. They again give a dinner to four

Brahmins on the ámávas of the fourth year, offering them the usual presents.

In some parts people of all castes shave themselves at a man's or woman's death on the third and fifth day, and then perform their ablutions in the Ganges, if near. In the third and fifth months they leave in a field a lamp lighted with castor oil, and give a dinner to their kith and kin. At a subsequent time they offer water to their ancestors for fifteen days, and on the date of the father's death perform some ceremonies like the Srádh described above, inviting Brahmins and others to a banquet. The wealthier people proceed to a place, Gayá, near Patna, in North-Eastern India, and there offer balls, attended with the necessary rites, to their ancestors, making, as usual, presents to the Brahmins who live in that holy locality.

THE BARBER.

UNLIKE in Europe, there are no shops in Indian towns that dazzle the eyes of observers by their gilded carvings and splendid decorations, and models of well-dressed heads displaying the tonsorial skill of the coiffeur; and observing the smooth chins, the short-cropped hair, and many shaven crowns of the people around him, a stranger would conclude that the Hindoos are a nation of skilful barbers, and that such a person as a professional barber is unknown among them. But he would be strangely mistaken; for no Hindoo, whether rich or poor, shaves himself or cuts his own hair, and often he does not pare even his own nails. If, however, he takes the trouble of observing a little more closely, he would now and then notice a man of quiet demeanour perambulating the streets near the bazaar, carrying a little

bag or a rolled-up bundle under his arm, and apparently not very solicitous of the attention of the passers-by. This is the Hindoo barber.

He does not, like his Chinese compeer, ring a bell or utter a peculiar cry; rarely he snaps his steel tweezers or blows a whistle, as in some parts of Southern India, as a signal. But in revenge for his shoplessness and want of pomp and display he holds a distinguished position among his countrymen, and his occupation is far wider in its operations than in Europe.

The barber has his fixed families to attend to, whom he visits in turn. He makes his daily call early in the morning—the servant announces his presence. You sit down comfortably in your veranda; the barber squats beside you. He unrolls his little bundle, displaying two or three razors, a pair of scissors, a small iron instrument to cut nails, a piece of leather for stropping, and a little brass cup which he fills up with cold—rarely hot—water, a small, indifferent looking-glass and a towel to receive the hair removed and the parings of nails. The barber has a dignified charm of manner and grace of attitude as he holds your face up with his left hand, and, with three or four fingers of the right, wets and rubs

the chin. Soap and brush he naturally does not affect, unless he plies his trade in those large towns where they have adopted outlandish manners. I must be understood to describe here the genuine Hindoo barber, as he is seen among genuine Hindoos, and not the person who waits upon Europeans or denationalised Hindoos; for he and his manner, too, are changing fast, like other persons and other things in India.

Well, you resign yourself into your barber's hands, as he, taking out his best razor and passing and repassing it several times on the palm of his hand, applies it to your chin. He polishes it up with a very light hand in two or three minutes, and to such a powerful and surprising extent that you hardly know your own face in the little looking-glass that he hands you to admire in it the perfection of his art. He takes the gray hairs out of your head, eyebrows, and moustache, and, trimming your nails and cleaning—if you desire it—your ears, folds up his case and attends other members of the family.

He is not an adept in the European coiffeur's mode of dressing the hair, nor does he bother his head much about different styles and fashions. He has his own way of operating on the hair,

which he does very quietly and smoothly. He does not pester you with the gossip of the place, nor does he blandly tell you, like the Italian barber, that you have got a beautiful mass of glossy hair, but goes straight at his business and opens not his lips—unless you question him on anything—until he finishes. Singeing, or shampooing, as understood in England, the Indian barber is quite innocent of; but he is a clever hand at the Indian shampooing, with which he finishes up his work. He presses the arms, hands, shoulders, and back after the shaving or hair-cutting. This is meant to make the body lighter and give it relief after fatigue, and is believed to be refreshing in a hot and enervating climate like India. The poor do not have fixed barbers to wait on them, but whenever they want the tonsor's services they call one of the peripatetic barbers in the streets, and sit down on one side of the street or under a tree to have themselves shaved.

People who are shaved by barbers not regularly engaged pay them immediately in cash. For a shave the barber gets from a halfpenny to a penny, and sometimes less, and for hair cutting from a penny to twopence. But near

every family has its own barber, who is, according to the native rate of payment, amply paid for his services. In towns he gets from three to six rupees (5s. to 10s.) a month, besides presents of small sums of money and clothes at weddings and other festivals. He is paid less in the country, in some parts of which he is paid partly in kind, getting some grain at harvest-time. Each barber serves several families, sometimes as many as thirty, in which case he engages other barbers to assist him. Besides, many family barbers, after discharging their fixed duties, go about the streets in quest of casual customers. So, taking all this into account, a Hindoo barber, considering his position in society, which is very low, is one of the best paid members of the native community.

The barbers belong to a very low caste, similar to that of washermen or blacksmiths. Like all other professions among the Hindoos, their business is hereditary, and their children are taught to shave and cut hair in their infancy. Lately several barbers' sons have been intrepid enough to break through the rules of their caste, and become clerks or follow higher occupations.

The barber is the village surgeon. He not only performs bleeding, cupping, and other common operations, but in orthodox places his services are called into requisition in cases demanding the skill of a practical surgeon; for surgery does not form any part of the education of the doctors, who are trained up in the old Hindoo method. In the country the barber bores little girls' ears and noses for putting in rings. He also occasionally hires himself out to poor villagers who cannot afford to keep regular servants, and does various other jobs. In parts where there are no professional matchmakers, the barber acts as a go-between in making arrangements for marriages, seeking out eligible brides or bridegrooms. Indeed, the barber is a most indispensable member of the Hindoo society. No rite can be performed without the presence of the family barber; and in many social ceremonies his position, notwithstanding his low caste, ranks only next to that of the Brahmin. At the birth of a child the barber carries the good news to the relations and friends of the family, to whom also he takes the invitation letters at the child's installation in caste, which corresponds to Christian baptism.

He plays an important part at a wedding, occupying himself in dressing the bridegroom and adorning his person, and in going on important errands. At a marriage feast, and also at other festivals, the barber is commissioned to visit the persons who are to be invited, and to solicit their attendance. And when all of them are assembled in the courtyard of the house, he hands the guests betels or the hookah. He also partakes of the food either with the guests, or retired to a short distance from them, in the interval of his services; and when the feast is over he removes the leavings, and distributes them among the Doms, one of the lowest of Hindoo castes. On the occasion of a funeral the family barber shaves the heads of the living and the dead, and invites friends and relations to the funeral. A Hindoo mourner is not considered clean after his usual period of mourning until he is touched by a barber.

The barber's wife is of equal importance, as a useful and necessary public servant, with her husband. In fact, most of the women of the barber caste follow the profession of the other sex. These female barbers go into the zenana and attend to the requirements of the ladies in the decoration of their persons. Besides, they

have other important duties to perform. After delivery a Hindoo mother cannot come out of her lying-in room until she is touched by the barber's wife. In the districts near Benares, at the birth of a child in Hindoo families, for the first six days the wife of a Chamár, a man of the leather caste, attends both upon the child and its mother, after which they are both committed to the care of a female barber. At weddings the barber's wife dresses the hair and trims the nails of the bride, and assists in the beautifying of her person. She has also a great deal to do at funerals, in divesting the widow of her usual clothes and ornaments and other fineries; in helping her in putting on her new mourning dress; and in attending upon her during the period of her mourning, when everybody else in the family avoids her contact.

BETEL.

THE chewing of the betel is a favourite habit with the Indians, Burmans, and other peoples of South-Eastern Asia. It is taken after meals, it is chewed during a visit, it is offered when you meet and when you separate—in short, at all times of the day, and even in the night, you will find the lips of most men and women in those countries slightly tinged with red, and the mouth breathing an aromatic smell, the result of chewing betels. Betel, when dressed with its proper ingredients—areca-nut, burnt shell-lime, etc.—is believed to help digestion, to sweeten the breath, and to quench the thirst. Like tobacco, it keeps off the pangs of hunger. It is also slightly narcotic. The lime, catechu, and the nut contained in it give the saliva a red colour, which it imparts to the lips and

gums. The areca-nut is supposed to strengthen the stomach and preserve the teeth.

It is customary, though the custom is dying out among the rising generation, to have the mouth perfumed with betel, unless one is going to address his superiors. Gallant women are very fond of the betel, as being a powerful incentive to love. It would be thought a breach of politeness among the Indians to take leave for any length of time without presenting each other with a purse of betels.

The word "betel" is derived from the Malayan word "betela," the name by which it is known in the south of India and Malay Archipelago, where Europeans first noticed the natives chewing it. The betel-leaf is pretty in shape—exactly like the ace of hearts, with the stem at the broader end—and sometimes as large as one foot in diameter, the general size being seven or eight inches long and six inches at the widest part. The betel belongs to the pepper family of creeping plants. It is very easily reared in the Indian Archipelago; but in India it requires manuring, frequent watering, and delicate care. In many parts of the latter country the betel-farmers erect a straw-thatched shed over the ground before they plant

the roots. The plants generally creep round thin sticks, and not only want protection from both heat and cold, but a peculiar manure and constant watching; for if too much water gets in through the thatch it must be drained off immediately, otherwise the plants will rot; and if one or two leaves turn bad you must at once clip them off, or the whole plant will be bad. In the far north of India the betel becomes an exotic, and very difficult to rear. The plant gives leaves fit for use in the second year, and continues to yield for more than thirty years, the quantity diminishing as the plants grow older. There are generally two kinds of betels, one being of lighter colour and better flavour than the other. The better kind requires a particular soil, and is confined to a few districts only, the richer classes alone being able to use it.

In the Tenasserim provinces the betel-vines are planted on the uplands, where there are tall forest-trees, the branches of which are lopped off, leaving only the topmost boughs. The vines readily climb up and weave their dark glossy leaves all over the summits, making a betel-vine farm a pretty sight. The boys and girls gather the leaf harvest with as much zest and alacrity

as marks hay-making in England. The most agile climbers of betel-covered trees are eagerly sought for by the young men as friends or partners in life.

The betel-leaf trade forms a good business with a particular class of people in India, who form a caste in themselves. The commoner kind is very cheap. In good seasons you can get as many as a hundred leaves for a penny, the better kind fetching a much higher price—about twenty only for a penny. Though the educated classes are giving up the habit of betel-chewing, still, it being a very cheap luxury, and supposed to contain many soothing properties, the trade in betel-leaves flourishes as well as ever. Besides, like smoking, when one gets into the habit of taking betels, it is very hard for him to give it up altogether.

The dressing of betels seems easy, but one has to be very careful about the quantity of lime and catechu he puts in, for on the skilful apportioning of them depend the taste and the colouring property of the betel. If you use wrong quantities of these ingredients, the betel tastes bitter or hot, often burning the tongue and the jaws. Betels well prepared have rather an agreeable taste, and, being cool and producing

water in the mouth, form in hot countries a tempting luxury for people who do not mind their lips and teeth coloured red. In fact, the colouring property of betels is a positive recommendation with women and young people. Betels are generally dressed with *chunam*, or burnt shell-lime in a liquid form, catechu, gambir (an extract from the foliage of *Uncaria gambir*), cracked areca-nut, and spicy seeds; cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, camphor, etc., are often added to make them rich. Many Nawabs, Rajahs, and Chiefs have little bits of musk put in their betels. Some people, especially among the lower classes, mix pieces of uncured tobacco-leaf with them.

There are plenty of shops in the towns where you can buy dressed betels—those of the commoner kind are sold eight or ten for a penny; but betels are prepared at home in most families. It being a light work, betel-dressing is confined to the ladies of the house, who display great smartness and dexterity in this pleasant occupation. In a respectable family, 200 to 300 betels are dressed every day, and, in festival times, as many as 5,000 betels are prepared in a day.

On such occasions, it is a very pretty and interesting sight to see about a dozen young

ladies busy in dressing betels, seated round a square board, on which are heaped up the leaves and other materials. They talk of their love matters as they nimbly ply their pretty, light fingers, gossip about other people's affairs, make all sorts of fun at each other, their faces beaming with smile and merriment, some almost rolling with laughter at the expense of a newly-married companion. One is busy washing the leaves, another is clipping off the stems of the new leaves and slitting them in the middle, another is putting them in a row on the board, placing the two parts of each leaf one over the other, two are mixing lime and catechu, four are putting in the other ingredients, two are folding them up in the shape of a cone or a triangle, and one is packing the dressed betels in small metal boxes or in wicker baskets. Thus, by the division of labour, 5,000 betels are finished within a few hours by the young ladies of the house, in the midst of great fun and merriment.

Many peculiar notions are connected with the betel in India. Amongst the Indians, whether Hindoos or Mahomedans, it is considered a gross insult if one does not accept the betel offered to him by his equal or superior.

Betels are a constant accompaniment of smoking, and, like a glass of wine or a cigar, contribute largely to the pleasure of conversation, and often soften the asperities of social intercourse. An interchange of betels brings friends closer and mollifies the animosities of foes. But betels have at the same time been the instrument of deadly mischief in some hands. There are several instances recorded in high life of past ages of turning the good sentiment underlying the acceptance of betels into a means of making short work of people who were considered as obnoxious or dangerous.

Here is an historical fact, narrated by Bernier, an eye-witness of the proceedings of the Moghul Court in its decadence. Begum Sahib, Emperor Shah Jehan's elder daughter, very handsome and intelligent, and passionately beloved by her father, formed an attachment for her steward, Nazin Khan, a Persian, a handsome and well-cultivated young man, and the favourite of the whole Court. Shah Jehan, who scornfully rejected the proposal of their marriage, suggested by a respectable nobleman of his Court, had already entertained some suspicion of an improper intercourse between the favoured nobleman and

the princess. He did not long deliberate on the course he should pursue. As a mark of distinguished favour, the Emperor presented the betel, before the whole Court, to the unsuspecting youth, who immediately masticated it, never for a moment imagining that he had received poison from the hand of the smiling monarch. Indulging in dreams of future bliss, he withdrew from the palace and ascended his palanquin, but such was the activity of the poison that he died before he reached home.

The acceptance of the betel is a pledge of friendship and honour among the Hindoos. The Rájpoot swears eternal fidelity by taking betel. A contract is performed or a serious engagement entered into by a mere exchange of betels. A high-born Hindoo will gladly sacrifice his life rather than turn false to his betel. Many thrilling stories are narrated about taking the *beera*, or betel, among the Rájpoots in their life-struggles against their relentless Páthán foes. Before the twenty-two thousand heroic horsemen of Pertáp Singh of Odeypore rushed to perish by the side of their noble and chivalrous chief in the gorge of Huldighát—the Thermopylæ of India—to save their native hills and dales against

an innumerable host of barbarous foes led by one of their own tribe, Mán Singh, and Selim, the heir of Akbar, each one of the devoted band took a betel offered by their chivalrous chief as a pledge of their fidelity, and of the devotion of their lives in the cause of their country.

THE TRAVELLER.

AN orthodox old Hindoo merchant is about to start on a journey of pilgrimage. Consulting his astrologer about the auspicious day and moment, and offering his prayers to the tutelary deities, he sets out early on an autumn morning, accompanied only by his servant. Notwithstanding the superior conveniences of the railway train or the modern spring carriage, which he can well afford to command, our merchant prefers to ride in his own bahlee, which is a sort of covered cart, roomy enough for three or four persons, drawn by two bullocks. He is seated in the middle under the canopy, with the driver sitting very near the yoke and the servant behind, both being outside the screens, which are let down, in the hot sun, during the rains, or when there is a lady in the bahlee. The inevitable

hookah, a couple of brass jugs (one of them with a long string, rolled into a ball, attached to it), a brass dish, an iron plate, a quilt, a blanket, and two suits of clothes form the whole luggage, over which the servant keeps an ever-watchful eye. The bullocks are well-fed and fat, and manage to go, with the occasional reminder of the whip, at the rate of twenty-four miles a day. The traveller serenely puffs away at his hookah as the squeaking cart lumbers along and now and then gives a severe shaking to his aged limbs.

All travellers, however, do not journey thus. The poor folk have to trust to their own legs. They keep themselves as light as possible, and always walk four or five together; some of them travelling forty miles or so a day. Others go on horseback, or let themselves be shaken to pieces in rough small carts drawn by single ponies. These horses and ponies are generally of a common breed, but very strong, and can stand roughing for a long time. A horse will carry a heavy bundle and a fat rider over twenty-four miles in a day. Then there are many people, whose number is increasing every day, who, rising superior to their old habits and prejudices,

or perhaps for more selfish reasons, take to the cheap and quick train, always crowding the third-class carriages, which seem to have a great fascination for even the richest.

Proceeding for five miles, the merchant halts for a while near a well, from which his servant draws some water by means of the brass jug with the long string tied to it. The master, washing his face and hands, squats in a cosy corner and takes to his hookah, the fire for which is provided for a few cowries by one of the fakeers on the road. These soon dispel his hope of a little quiet enjoyment by their oppressive attention; assailing him with long-winded petitions, and pouring forth their loud benedictions, accompanied with violent gesticulation. The dinned traveller, giving up his pipe and all expectation of quiet comfort, gets into his cart again, flinging a handful of coppers to the beggars; who, however, clamorously follow the cart for a long way, demanding more backsheesh.

Some of these dirt-begrimed ascetics are very dangerous companions on the road. There have been cases, in times not very remote, in which robbers—the remnant of the notorious Thugs—under the garb of sanctity, most obligingly

offered tobacco to unsuspecting travellers, who, inhaling the poisonous drugs concealed in it, died on the spot, the fakeers making off with their property. In some parts of Northern India there are large wells with steps leading to the bottom, at the mouths of which stand two or three rooms for the convenience of travellers. Robbers used in former times to conceal themselves in these rooms, and when single wayfarers came to draw water at the well, they would despatch them with their secreted daggers and quietly throw the dead bodies into one of the dark cellars at its bottom.

On the main road leading to Agra there is a well-known reservoir of water called "the old woman's tank," in the middle of which is a large solid-built house with cellars and a bridge leading to one of the banks. In this house there once lived a Thug family, an old woman and her two sons. The old woman used to coax travellers who rested a while under a large tree on the road which runs along that bank to partake of the cool shelter of her apartment. She then offered them tobacco. The travellers soon felt the effect of the drugged leaf. The female Thug's sons helped her in making short work of the

senseless wayfarers, whose bodies were afterwards flung into the cellars, which were full of water. The murderous family were found out after a short time, and shared the fate of their race; but the house in which so many innocent lives were lost under horrible circumstances still stands in the middle of the tank.

The traveller has to be very careful as to the company he meets on the road. Once a lady, who had some money and jewels with her, was travelling with her little boy, when she was pursued for a long way by two women disguised as poor travellers, begging her to save them from starvation. The kind lady gave them some food to eat. Her watchful little boy observed that the women ate all the food except the portion which was cooked with salt. The sharp little fellow immediately whispered to his mother about this strange conduct. The latter at once knew the character of the recipients of her charity. The salted portion was thrown away because the women would not kill a person whose salt they had eaten. *Namak-harámee*, or being false to salt, is the basest form of ingratitude known in the East. The cleverness of the little boy thus saved the lives of both his mother and himself.

Even at the present day, when the Thugs have been all hunted down, whole jungles—the great haunts of robbers—cut away, and macadamised roads constructed, travelling is not safe after dark in certain parts of the country, especially in Southern India and in some of the territories whose rulers are not over-watchful of the safety of their wayfaring subjects.

Our merchant, after safely performing more than half of his journey, makes a long halt about mid-day under a tope of trees on the wayside. His servant, who belongs to the same caste with him, then begins to dress his victuals, procuring the materials from a banya, who has his little shop there containing the usual wants of travellers. The poor wayfarers have to prepare their own food as best they can, some being satisfied with a mere basketful of parched grains, which they get from the grocer for a halfpenny. In a hot climate like India one feels quite refreshed after a light meal and a good draught of cold water; and so Hindoo travellers, rich or poor, are all contented with a scanty fare. The bahlee jolts along again after three o'clock, and, with another halt in the middle, the traveller reaches a serai or inn on the main road, where he passes the

night, resuming his journey on the morrow as soon as the crows begin to caw.

In the hot season travellers set out much earlier—as early as two a.m., when the shades have hardly begun to disappear—and halt for refreshment in the forenoon. Most of them, finishing their stage by that time, repair to one of the inns, and do not travel again for the rest of the day. Some do a little more journeying in the afternoon, reaching the inn at five p.m. During the winter months, when the days are short and nights very cold, the mid-day halt is a good deal curtailed, and people set out late in the morning and reach the end of their stage before the cold winds begin to blow in the evening.

INNS.

IT is on an autumn evening that we approach near a large serai on the main road in Northern India. Its mouldering walls and dilapidated cornices indicate that it must have been built at least three hundred years ago, probably by the order of the beneficent Emperor Akbar. The inn, like the ordinary serais in the East, is a one-storied, square building, with no windows or apertures on the outside walls. Close to the large massive gate stand a few thatched shops, at which some lately arrived travellers are buying flour, ghee, salt, earthen pots, and other articles required for the preparation of the evening meal; while here and there rises a large leafy tree, giving shelter to half-a-dozen ruminating bullocks and horses.

Entering by the old-fashioned doorway, a

strange sight of uproar and confusion meets us. A whole lot of carts, waggons, and other vehicles of curious shape and build stand in a perfect jumble in the middle of the spacious courtyard, which is planted with a few trees, under which horses, ponies, and bullocks are resting their tired limbs. Men and women of all sorts and conditions are shouting and bustling about. Some are feeding their horses, brushing their bullocks, calling them sweet names as they deal gentle, refreshing blows on their backs, or greasing the wheels of the carts so as to get them ready for the morrow's journey; while groups of chattering women, half-veiled, of strong, well-formed limbs, with rows of coins and beads round their necks, are passing and repassing with pitchers on their heads, which they fill up at the wells in the corners of the yard. Some men, with their heads and backs bare, are lighting fires in the veranda running round the place, and, almost suffocated with the smoke, are bawling out to the innkeeper to give them more wood, or grumbling with an oath that the cowdung cakes which they paid for are not dry enough to light the fires with. Others are engaged in sedately partaking of their meals, or lying down on mats smoking their hookahs and

relating to each other the occurrences of the day, while a merry party are beating tom-toms and cymbals with all their might, and singing doubtful songs as loudly as they can, which complete the general uproar of the place.

The traveller, on reaching the inn, leaves his cart and horse in the yard and follows one of the innkeepers (each inn being let to a number of innkeepers), who oppress him with their attention. Engaging one of the rooms behind the veranda, he puts down his bundles, and, easing himself of part of his dress, goes to the nearest well to have a wash. Then, procuring his wants from the shops outside or from his innkeeper, he starts his cooking in the fireplace in front of his room, which he takes good care beforehand to thoroughly cleanse of the defilement made by his predecessor. Sometimes he orders a quantity of flour and dál from the innkeeper, who sells them cheap, about one-third of which disappears in the capacious bag of the busy wife of that obliging individual. If the traveller be Hindoo, he generally cooks his own meal, unless he is accompanied by a Brahmin or by one of his own caste. The Mussulman, except when he has his servant to cook for him, or be too

poor or proud, gets the innkeeper, who is his co-religionist, to dress his food. On this account the Mahomedans carry with them only a small tinned copper plate and a water pot, whereas the Hindoos travel always provided with a whole set of cooking utensils.

Each traveller takes a single room, unless he has his family or servants with him. A man of rank and wealth will occupy a suite of rooms raised above the ground, and furnished with a bath-room, which, however, is not to be found in the ordinary inns, which are similar in construction and accommodation all over the East. In cases of poor men with no family, some four or five of them are stowed in one room, the rent for which is about a penny a night.

By ten o'clock, when the noise and bustle have ceased, and the inmates of the inn—both men and beasts—have all been fed and made comfortable, the travellers stretch themselves on the floor, or on the hired wooden frame, over which they spread their own blankets or quilts—sleeping out in the veranda in very hot weather. The gate of the inn is then locked. In serais where there is no gate to be locked, the drivers of carts sleep out in the yard, securing the beasts

by means of long chains, one end of which is attached to the waggons, as bullocks, horses, and even camels are sometimes stolen away at night. The people to retire last are the innkeepers.

These inkeepers, who are looked down upon by all as a degraded race, are a peculiar class of people, professing a debased form of Mahomedanism. They keep strictly to themselves, marrying only into families of their own calling. The good Mussulmans loathe to form any connection with them, and the Hindoos shun their touch as the vilest pollution. They are an exceedingly noisy and quarrelsome lot. As soon as a traveller arrives all the innkeepers, male and female, rush out, and with lowered heads and folded arms vociferously dilate, all at the same time, on the excellence and comfort of their respective rooms; and, addressing him as the "great king," or the "monarch of the earth," most humbly beg him to honour his or her room with the "odorous dust of his benign feet."

In the day-time, while the men are out, the women have a little account to settle among themselves. The slightest pretext sets them running full tilt at each other, and amid a volley of unsavoury titles, not only to themselves but

also to their parents and grandparents, they scratch each other's cheeks, tear the hair, or spit at each other's noses. This entertainment lasts for a couple of hours or longer, at the end of which their rage cools down a little. But at nightfall the disfigured damsels, reinvigorated with rest and refreshment, and reinforced by male arms, reopen their old sores and continue the operation, until they drop down fatigued or are stopped by the travellers.

It is the duty of the innkeepers to go after dark to the nearest police-station and report to the officer there the number of travellers staying at the inn, their names, religions, and future destinations, and the number and description of the waggons and weapons that are with them. All this information is carefully entered in a book. The travellers are then reminded by the innkeepers or the police to keep their money in a safe place, and not to accept any tobacco or any eatable from a stranger, or to form any intimacy with him on the way. They are also instructed not to keep their money in the same piece of cloth in which any food was wrapped up, for the wild dogs that prowl about the inn at night sometimes carry away the money, mistaking it for food.

There are always some men at the inn to keep watch at night, and travellers with merchandise or valuable articles have to pay them a trifle when they leave the place.

Besides the ordinary serais there are several charity inns in India where travellers are lodged gratis. In some parts of Southern India, these inns, or choultries, as they are called, have accommodations and appointments very like the khans or caravan-serais of Mussulman countries. They generally consist of two square courts, enclosed by low buildings, which are covered with a tiled roof, and divided into small apartments to meet the requirements of travellers. In many instances, as in that of Vir Permal's choultry, near Conjeveram, these buildings are surrounded on the outside by a colonnade, and are constructed of well-cut granite. At Madhagiri, in the far South, there stands in the midst of beautifully laid-out gardens one of the handsomest buildings for the free reception of travellers, erected by the public-spirited Mul Rajah.

In Behar, in North-Eastern India, there is an elegant and commodious inn of the kind, built out of the funds bequeathed by a charitable Mahomedan. In the middle of the spacious square

enclosed by it, which is planted here and there with shady trees, is a large masonry-built well, with excellent water. Both Hindoos and Mahomedans halt at this serai, forgetting for the time their mutual antipathies after the toil and fatigue of a long journey under a red-hot sky. In one room does the Canouji Brahmin cook his dál and chupatty, and in the next does the Mussulman eat his roast beef and onions.

By making charity inns and public tanks the wealthy Hindoos endeavour to procure a lasting good name; and they certainly deserve it, as the sums they expend in this way are very considerable, and the utility of the works is very great. Princes vie with their opulent subjects in constructing the charitable buildings, which give much appreciated shelter to many a poor wayfarer in the burning regions of India.

THE WATER-CARRIER.

IN the streets of any Indian town may be seen waddling along the bent figure of a strong-built man, of a demure aspect, continually making a tic-tic noise with a small brass plate and a pebble, which he holds in his right hand, while his left arm swings heavily to and fro as he carries a large inflated skin slung from his shoulders and resting over his loins. This is the Bhistee, or Mahomedan water-carrier.

His *mashak*, or skin, when full, holds about ten gallons of water—a by no means inconsiderable weight to carry on one's back. Filling it up at a river, pond, or well, the Bhistee, when not regularly employed in anybody's service, hawks it about in the streets, selling the whole or part of the water for a trifling sum. The price for a skin of water is generally about a

penny; but it varies, according to the quality —that is, whether it is drinking water or that required for ablutions or other common purposes —and also according to the scarcity or plenty of water in the locality in which the Bhistee plies his trade. In the Presidency towns, the introduction of water supply through pipes after the European fashion is ruining the business of the Bhistee, but in the country at large it flourishes as well as ever.

In a hot climate like India the water-carrier's services are in demand at every moment. He supplies water for drinking, ablutions, and all domestic purposes of a vast number of people, for watering the roads, irrigating the fields, building houses, and for all public works; he is a most necessary member of any military expedition or gathering in India. And it is perhaps for this reason that he enjoys the high title of "Bhistee," or more correctly, "Bahishtee," a Persian word signifying "the heavenly"—a name which the water-carrier shares in common with the pelican, so called from the tradition that, during a severe drought at Mecca, numbers of these sagacious birds brought water in their pouches for the relief of the inhabitants of the

sacred city. The Bhistee is really an importation into India from Arabia and Persia, and his work is more arduous in the deserts and littoral districts of Arabia, where sweet water is very scarce, than in India, where there are plenty of rivers, ponds, and wells.

The mode of filling up the goat-skin at sea-coasts where there are submarine springs of fresh water is quite peculiar. The diver, sitting in his boat, winds a great goat-skin bag around his left arm, the hand grasping its mouth; then he takes in his hand, or stands on, a heavy stone, to which is attached a strong line, and, thus equipped, he plunges in and quickly reaches the bottom. Instantly opening the bag over the strong jet of fresh water, he springs up, at the same time closing the bag. The stone is then hauled up, and the diver, after taking breath, plunges in again. To facilitate the filling the water-bag, a stone with a hole in its middle is usually fitted over the mouth of the spring.

There is another Mahomedan water-carrier in India, called Pakhalee, who carries water in double skins (pakhals) slung across the back of a bullock. You meet him only in the country—in villages and in the fields—

where his services are greatly appreciated. But the Hindoos, who form the great majority of the Indian population, will never drink, nor use for ablutions, water supplied by the Mahomedan Bhistee, so let us turn to the more indigenous water-carrier of Hindostan.

The Hindoo water-carrier does not hawk about in the streets, but confines his services to respectable Hindoo families, by whom he is regularly employed, like an ordinary domestic servant. He carries water in large brass or earthen pitchers, suspended from the ends of a pole laid across one of his shoulders at right angles to it, thus differing from the manner of the London milkmen, who carry their pole parallel to the shoulder. The water-carrier is paid from four to ten rupees a month. His wife, too, is engaged by the high-caste Hindoos to scour their brass pots, jugs, and dishes, to wash the kitchen, and occasionally to give a thorough cleaning to every part of the house.

The Hindoo water-carrier belongs to the Kahár caste, nearly on a level with the barber and the shepherd. The Kahárs also act as fishermen, catching fish in nets only. They are often employed by Europeans as domestic

servants. One of the chief callings of this caste is to carry litters of the wealthy people, who sometimes employ Kahárs solely for that purpose, respectable Hindoo ladies being always carried from one place to another in palanquins, with curtains all round. In order to lighten their burden, the Kahárs, splitting a thick bamboo, lay the flat side upon a pad on the shoulder, which, being elastic, greatly relieves them, while the pad keeps the skin from being galled.

The Kahárs get so much accustomed to the pole, whether of the litter or of the water-carrying apparatus, that it is said they cannot walk fast enough without it. It is related that once some Kahárs of the Emperor Akbar fled from his service. On hearing this, the Emperor asked his attendants whether the defaulting Kahárs had taken anything with them. This was answered in the negative. "Then," said Akbar, "they cannot have gone far; we shall soon catch them."

Another occupation of the water-carrier caste is towing and paddling boats. Kahárs have boats of different sizes, some of them carrying a cargo of a thousand maunds (a maund is about

eighty-two pounds in Northern India). They keep one or two small, coarse sails. When there is no wind to help them, they use their oars going down a river; but up the stream, against the current, the boat is towed—not a very easy process in India. Eight or ten men are required to manage a large boat. These boats are mostly used for merchandise, though some people prefer them for travelling.

One clan of the Kahár caste is employed in agriculture. Some make nets and baskets, or pick, when in season, the Singhára, an aquatic fruit growing plentifully in ponds and tanks in Northern India; others work as porters and labourers. But the chief occupation of the Kahárs is to carry water or litters. They are the highest caste that can usually be got for such service. But, notwithstanding their low caste, habits, and practices—which are quite different from those of the better classes—water-carriers' services are always held in high esteem. Indeed, the water-carrier, whether Hindoo or Mahomedan, is a great favourite among the natives of India; which is, of course, owing to the article he supplies, water being so precious to the children of a burning climate. The

Bhistee is one of the common characters introduced in the operas, puppet-shows, and other exhibitions, where the dancing and singing of the mashak-bearer are very much cheered. Like the barber, the water-carrier, for his usefulness, often takes precedence of his superiors in the social scale. And he has reasons to be very proud.

Indeed, a water-carrier once sat on the proudest seat in India. A Bhistee had the supreme pleasure of issuing the mandates of his will, though for a very limited time, from the high throne of Delhi in the proudest days of the Moghul Empire. This is how history explains the cause of the extraordinary good luck of the humble water-carrier.

After a long period of hostilities between the Emperor Humayun and Sher Khan, it seemed once that their fierce conflicts were over at last. The terms of agreement between them were easily arrived at. Already the soldiers of the two armies met daily in friendly converse, when suddenly Sher Khan, noticing the too great confidence of Humayun, took advantage of his want of vigilance to surprise his camp in the dead of night. So complete was the

surprise that Humayun, wounded in the arm by an arrow, escaped only by urging his horse into the river. The Moghul Emperor lost his seat in the plunge, and would have been drowned had not a water-carrier pushed to him his inflated goat-skin. Holding this, Humayun was towed by the water-carrier to the opposite bank, where he safely landed. The grateful Emperor instantly promised the Bhistee that he would "place him on the throne." Holding Court a short time afterwards at Agra, the Emperor saw the water-carrier approaching towards him. Remembering his vow, he descended, and placed his humble preserver on the throne for the remainder of the day. Whatever orders the throned Bhistee issued were obeyed, and the shrewd fellow made the best of his short Imperial authority by placing his family and his friends in positions which secured them against want for the remainder of their days.

WELLS.

FROM time immemorial drawing water at the well has been one of the principal daily duties of a poor Hindoo wife. In Northern India wells are generally dug outside the town or village; wherefrom the women, old and young (but more often the latter), start twice a day—early in the morning and at about four o'clock in the afternoon—to fetch water home, carrying earthen vessels on their head or under one of the arms.

Arriving at the well, they attach the loose end of the rope that is fastened at one side of its circular mouth to the earthen pitcher, which they then let down into the well. The vessel will hold about six or seven quarts of water, which is a good weight to pull up; and the women have to take great care that the vessel, which comes up with a swinging motion, does not strike against

the sides of the well, as the least stroke would dash it to pieces. Sometimes one or two beams are thrown across the well near the edge, whereon the women rest one of their feet, throwing on it the weight of their whole body. Of course I must be understood to describe here the primitive wells, from which water is drawn solely by the hand. Very often you may see fifteen or twenty women assembled at a well, who, after having a great deal of gossiping, go home in groups, balancing their pitchers full of water in the manner previously described, some of them carrying as many as three such vessels at a time—two on the head (one on top of another) and the third under one of the arms.

The caste difficulty shows itself as prominently at the well as elsewhere. Women of different castes must not touch each other's vessels. Hindoos of various sects will not take water to drink from each other. In some parts, at the wells where both men and women draw water, the Brahmins will use brass or copper vessels belonging to persons of other castes, after scrubbing them well with dust and water and washing them. A leather bag need only be washed, for, having come originally from the tanner, who is of very low caste,

no further defilement can happen to it. But strict Hindoos, whether Brahmins or others, will never drink water that has been drawn in a leather bag, nor use it for ablutions.

In villages where there is but one well, persons of low caste and out-castes draw water on one side of it, and when they are gone Brahmins and other superior castes come and draw water from the other side. When there are many wells in a village, it is usual to set apart a special one for people of low or no castes. A dog or other animal falling into a well defiles it entirely; and, to render it fit for use again, all the water must be drawn from it at least three times, and Ganges water or cows' urine poured into it. A high-caste woman meeting a funeral on her way home with water from a well will sometimes throw away the water at once as defiled. The dead body of an animal defiles also; and no water is procurable until it has been removed from the way to the well, and the ground purified.

Wells are naturally greatly prized in the arid hot parts of India, and many Hindoos earn great renown by making them where they are much needed. Some religious people seek for merit in

the construction of large wells in public thoroughfares and other places for the purpose of supplying travellers with water. Very often people use them for irrigating their fields. A large well, built of strong masonry, with a circular, white, smooth platform round it for people to sit on when they draw or drink water, costs from 2,000 to 3,000 rupees. Even the wants of the brute creation are not overlooked by the Hindoos. They make reservoirs of strong masonry, about five or six yards long and a yard wide, adjoining a well, and in the hot season these are always kept filled with water. Returning from pasture or from the fields in the forenoon for repose, and retiring at dusk for the night, whole droves of cows, bullocks, buffaloes, and goats slake their thirst here. Landowners and wealthy men vie with each other in constructing these wells and reservoirs; and princes sometimes imitate the example of their opulent subjects.

The average cost of an ordinary well has been estimated to be about three or four hundred rupees. Of course it varies not only according to the depth of water and kind of soil, but also the kind of labour employed. Some peasants,

who, with members of their own families, make wells themselves, have been known to have constructed them, especially where the water is near the surface, at a trifling cost of 100 rupees each. Nevertheless, even in those parts of the country where the cost is very moderate, the wells are insufficient.

Wells have been objects of great endearment with some villagers. Not satisfied with wasting time and money in their own and their children's marriages and in those of idols and trees, they sometimes marry wells with great pomp and ceremony. In some parts of the country wells are worshipped, and votive offerings are often seen lying near them.

Wells in India were at one time put to the most dreadful uses. Wayfarers and others were murdered and their bodies thrown down into them. Criminals were often thrown down them, and even at this day many horrid deeds are done at the wells in out-of-the-way parts of India.

Jung Bahadur, of Nepal, used to tell a remarkable story about a well. A not uncommon mode of execution in Nepal is to throw the offender down a well. It occurred to young Jung,

who was bred up amidst the intrigues and plots and counterplots of the Nepalese Court, that it was the fault of the victim if he did not come up again alive and unhurt; and, in order to test the matter and also to be prepared for any case of future emergency, he practised the art of jumping down wells. By-and-by it actually happened that Jung was sentenced by his Prince to this punishment. Undismayed, he begged one last favour of his Sovereign: that he might be permitted to jump in. So reasonable a request was at once granted.

Surrounded by a large number of people, the Prince himself forming one of the sightseers, Jung went to a well, where, taking off his superfluous clothes he crossed his legs, jumped boldly down, and in a moment was lost to the view of the Prince and his courtiers; who, assured of the doom of their victim by the dull splash, returned to the palace. The supposed drowned man, however, was quite safe and sound, clinging to the sides of the well, which he knew beforehand to be plentifully provided with chinks and crannies. At midnight, his friends, who had been previously rehearsed in their part, came and rescued him from his uncomfortable position. 'After a while,

when affairs in the Nepalese Court took a favourable turn for him, Jung Bahadur allowed his friends to resuscitate him ; and this adventure did much to restore the future Prime Minister of Nepal to the favour of his Sovereign.

THE BARD.

IN native India, especially in Rajputana, where only at the present day the Hindoo institutions can be seen in their primitive state, the Bháts, or bards, occupy a distinguished position in Hindoo society. They stand higher in public estimation even than the Brahmins, who claim by their birthright the highest rank among the Indian people.

Like the troubadours and minstrels of Europe during the Middle Ages, they are principally occupied in chanting their own verses, or legends, from the mythology of India; and it is from them that the princes learn the history and genealogy of their races, in which the Bháts are always deeply versed. Their style of musical recitation is very attractive, and not unpleasing even to a stranger, and the beauty of the poetry is enhanced by their sweet modulation of the

voice, and their graceful action and delivery. The subject of their songs, like that of the old English ballads, is the praise of some renowned warrior, a victory, some tragical events of contemporary history, or the adulation of some powerful patron.

The bards frequently attain very high rank in the Courts of Rajpoot Rajahs and Mahratta chieftains, nearly every one of whom has his family bard, who, on all public occasions and visits of ceremony, attends in the feudal hall or joins the processions and pageants, singing the praises of the prince in the most hyperbolical and figurative language. Sometimes the Bháts are employed as ambassadors to represent their Sovereigns in the Courts of other monarchs; at others, they offer themselves as security to the different Governments for the payment of their revenue, for the honesty and fidelity of the land-holders and others, and for the performance of bonds between individuals. And no other pledge is held so sacred as this; for upon its infringement the bard, proceeding to the house of the offender, will either shed his own blood or that of one of his family, imprecating upon the head of the guilty the most dreadful vengeance of the gods. When the Bháts enter into an agreement

with either prince or community, instead of signing their names or affixing their seals, as is customary among the other tribes, they draw upon the paper the figure of the dagger, their usual instrument of death.

The Bháts often occupy a humbler but not less useful station; they are the chief carriers of Rajputana and other parts, and also conduct the caravans through the wildest and most desolate regions. Their persons bear a peculiar charm in the eyes of the populace, and their sacred character overawes the lawless tribes, who, fearless on all other occasions, dread the anathema of the bards. The traveller, therefore, who desires to pursue his route from the interior to the coast, places himself under their convoy, and is in safety.

But the sacred character of their persons often impels the Bháts into the commission of injustice and a contempt for the laws and Government. According to ancient usage they are supposed to be exempt from the payment of all taxes, and for the maintenance of this privilege they are at all times ready to shed their blood. They do not care for the general interests of humanity, nor do they feel the least even while their surrounding countrymen are crushed to the earth by

impositions. To every demand that they should contribute their quota for the government of the country, they sternly reply: "It is not in the bond."

An example of this stolid, debasing selfishness occurred at Neriad, in Western India, during the wars in which the English were the allies of the Mahrattas. The inhabitants, twice assessed and plundered within three months, were reduced to the extreme of misery; houses were robbed of every movable; families, who had delivered up their last mite, wandered about the streets almost in nakedness; and torture was mercilessly inflicted upon such as were backward in yielding up their property. Under these circumstances it was expected that the Bháts would consent to bear a part of the public burdens, and thus preserve a portion at least of their townsmen from utter ruin. But although they could easily discharge a much higher sum than was required of them by the allies, they remained firm in their determination, and, resolving to brave every violence, preferred death to submission.

The conquerors not relaxing the rigour of their demands, the whole tribe of Bháts—men, women, and children—armed with daggers, re-

paired to a spacious open area in the city, and, imprecating a dreadful curse upon their demandants, rushed upon each other's weapons with so much fury and violence, that before the amazed troops could succeed in disarming them numbers had already perished. There was one man who was more cool and deliberate in his fierceness. He placed himself directly before the door of the durbar, surrounded by two younger brothers and a beautiful sister, all under eighteen years of age. Here he first stabbed the lovely virgin to the heart, then one of his brothers; but before he raised the dagger to the breast of the second brother, his bloody hand was arrested. He was afterwards heard to boast that he had a few months before sacrificed his father in the same glorious cause.

This intrepidity and contempt of death in the Bháts, which would be heroism if well directed, is seldom exerted for the good of mankind; and the advantage which might result to the State from the respect paid to them is neutralised by their avarice and constant evasion of the payment of all established duties.

A memorable example of this occurred during the reign of Rajah Umrah the First of Mewar,

in Rajputana. The Rajah would not submit to the insolent demands of the bards, when they had recourse to one of the most sanguinary sacrifices ever recorded. Collecting all their men, women, and youths of both sexes in the court of the palace, they despatched themselves with their daggers to the number of eighty souls, before the very eyes of the Rajah, who had hardly any time to restrain them in the execution of their bloody intent. This self-immolation of the bards weighed heavily on the Rajah's mind, for it was a species of excommunication, which would have unsettled a weaker reason.

The Rajpoot might repose after the murder of a Brahmin, but that of the prophetic bards would rise against him, both here and hereafter. But for once they encountered a mind too strong to be shaken. The Rajah banished the whole fraternity of these Bháts, who were leaders of large caravans, from his dominions. Long exile had made no alteration in their sentiments and opinions, and the dagger was always at hand to be sheathed in their own flesh, whenever provocation called it from the girdle. The banished bards managed to smuggle themselves after a few years into the Rajah's territories.

Their surviving chief beset the then Rajah in all his rides, demanding a reduction, or rather abolition of duties imposed on their caravans; and at length took up a position on the terrace fronting the balcony of the palace, threatening to take suicidal revenge.

The reigning Rajah, who had not the nerve of his predecessor, besought the interference of Colonel Tod, the British Resident at his Court. The Colonel invited the Bháts to a settlement, and they came, as fine, robust, intrepid a set as he ever saw. He urged that duties must be paid by all who chose to frequent the passes of Mewar, and that they would get nothing by their present silly mode of endeavouring to obtain remission; that if they would give a written agreement to abide by the scale of duties laid down, they should receive exemption for five hundred out of the forty thousand bullocks of their caravan, and be reinducted into their native places; if not, there were daggers (showing them some on the table), and they might begin as soon as they pleased; and added that, in addition to the penalty of banishment, he would recommend confiscation of their entire caravan. The bards, who came to negotiate, hesitated a

little, but accepted the condition, and the exemption for five hundred; and that day received gold bracelets and clothes of investiture from the Rajah.

At the present day the Bháts have lost none of their intrepidity, or of their sacred character, though they do not retain their ancient fierceness or their debasing selfishness. They still maintain their high position, though diminished in glory; and they still perform their principal functions calmly, which their ancestors did in troubled times. The Hindoo bards now sing hymns of peace, of praise, and of glory in peaceful palaces and quiet cottages instead of, as in former times, chanting songs of war, of bravery, and of heroism on the eve of battle, inciting people to glorious actions, and clothing them, when successfully performed, with renown and immortality.

NOTE.—Many of the facts in this sketch are taken from Tod's "Annals of Rajsthan."

THE RITE OF JOHUR.

LAST year a repetition of the Johur ordeal occurred in a Brahmin village near Neemuch, in Rajputana; the object being to avoid the Tonk Durbar assessment. The two victims calmly ascended the funeral pyre, and bravely met death.

Johur is an awful rite. A whole tribe may become extinct by it, as is seen by several instances recorded in the history of the Rajpoot States. What it signifies is the burning of women to save their honour. The Rajpoot is profoundly jealous of the honour of his women; and to prevent their falling into the hands of conquerors, then to be dealt with as was often the case in the wars with the Mahomedans, he has recourse to the Johur: that is to say, the immolation of every female of the family. And

the Rajpoot woman gladly embraces such a refuge from pollution; or even if she were not in fear of being forced away as a captive, she would prefer it to living on as a widow.

The loss of a battle or the capture of a city during the Mahomedan invasions was usually the time when this dreadful rite was practised. At the end of the famed siege of Cheetore, the ancient capital of the Rana of Odeypore, by Ala-ud-din, in 1303, the Rajpoot chief, after an arduous day, passed the night in pondering the means by which he might save from the general destruction one at least of his twelve sons. Eleven of them fell during the next few days; and when but one son remained to the Rana, he proclaimed the Johur.

The funeral pyre was lighted within subterranean chambers where the sun's rays had never entered, and the defenders of Cheetore beheld the queens, and their own wives and daughters to the number of several thousands, pass in procession to the fire. The beautiful Pudmani, the consort of the Rana, who was believed to be the chief object of attraction for the conquering Tartar, came last in the

throng. The door of the caverns closed; the fires raged within; and the honour of the Rajpoot women was saved. When afterwards Ala-ud-din entered the capital on the death of the Rana and his surviving son, who fell in the conflict, he found it strewn with the bodies of its defenders; while smoke yet issued from the recesses where the women had perished.

Again during the second siege of Cheetore by Bahadoor Shah of Gujrat in 1530, when the bravest had fallen in defending the breach caused by his artillery (it was served by Portuguese adventurers), the Johur was proclaimed. There was little time to build the pyre. Combustibles were heaped up in hurriedly made hollows in the ground, and magazines were placed around them. The mother of the infant prince led the procession of willing victims to their doom, and 13,000 females were thus immolated at once.

Instances of the same practice occur several times in the history of Jessulmir, another Rajpoot State. During the fierce contest between Mulraj and Mabub Khan in 1294, the former defended himself obstinately, and more than once beat back his assailants with heavy loss. But presently,

finding that large reinforcements had arrived for the enemy and that his cause was hopeless, he retired to the inner apartments of his palace and told their inmates that they must part to meet in heaven, while he gave up his own life in defence of their honour and their faith. And what Mulraj did, the chiefs about him did. The night was passed together in preparation for the awful morning. As soon as the day broke, all the women, young and old, saying their prayers as they went, gathered at the palace gate. Then they bade a last farewell to all their kin; the Johur commenced, and 24,000 females, from infants to old women, perished—some by the sword, others in the fire. Not one of them quailed. This done, Mulraj and his chiefs performed their ablutions, placed the sacred *toolshee* leaf in their casques, put on the saffron robe, as was the custom with the Rajpoots, and awaited the battle. On the morrow the enemy advanced, and Mulraj, with 700 of his kin, was slain.

In the Johur on the occasion of Firoz Shah's attack upon Jessulmir, some years after the event above described, 16,000 females were destroyed.

The Johur was practised not only when the

foe was the lustful and bloodthirsty Tartar; there are also instances of it in the intertribal wars of the Rajpoots. Numerous inscriptions on stone and on brass, according to archæologists, record as the first token of victory the captive wives of the foe; and with regard to female captives in war, the practices of the ancient Hindoos seem to be analogous to those of the disciples of Moses and Mahomed.

THE GUROO, OR PONTIFF.

AMONG the Brahminical priests of India there is one particular class who, in their authority and condition, bear a great resemblance to the Bishops and Pontiffs of the Catholic Church in Europe: These are the Guroos, a name signifying "Master." Their influence has lately been somewhat decaying in the British territories, but they still retain their authority and proud position in the orthodox native States. They stand high above the ordinary priests, receiving the highest honour and the largest amount of presents on all grand occasions. One of their principal functions is the indoctrination of their flocks in the mystic rites and incantations.

At stated intervals the Hindoo pontiffs make the circuit of their respective dioceses, examining into the conduct of the inferior priests, and ad-

ministering important rites at the temples. The most sanctified amongst them greatly extend their pilgrimages in order to perform certain solemn ceremonies at their colleges and in their sacred groves. But the greatest portion of the year the Guroos spend in luxurious abodes, called Singhásans, or thrones, which are sufficiently numerous in the various provinces of India, as each sect and caste has its own pontiff.

Some of them are attached as chaplains to the household of the rajahs and chiefs, whom they accompany on all their journeys and expeditions. These live in a style of great magnificence and splendour, sometimes eclipsing that of their Royal masters. Besides the presents which they constantly receive from their rich and powerful disciples, they frequently enjoy grants of landed estates and of other kinds of valuable property. A certain portion of land is set apart by all landed proprietors for the use of their Guroos, who also receive a share of the produce of other lands.

Except during their visitations, which take place once in three or four years, or at longer intervals, the Hindoo pontiffs live in retirement, in a kind of monastery, near a temple. Here

they give audience to numerous disciples, many of whom come from afar to do them homage, to receive their blessing and gift, to offer them presents, or to consult them respecting some affair of caste or ceremonial. With those Gŭroos who marry, the dignity descends from father to son; but those who remain single sometimes choose coadjutors in their lifetime, who succeed them on their death, or a successor is nominated by the other pontiffs.

When the superior Guroos go on their visitations they are surrounded by every circumstance of great magnificence and splendour. Seated in a rich palanquin or on the back of a splendidly caparisoned elephant, surrounded by numerous bodies of horse and foot armed with glittering weapons, with flags and standards adorned with pictures of the gods waving over their heads, and musicians playing on all sorts of instruments, preceded by a part of his officers, who chant odes in his praise, or admonish the awe-stricken spectators to receive the mighty Guroo with becoming honour and reverence, the Hindoo pontiff moves along in true princely style, while burning incense and other costly perfumes scatter their grateful odours among the multitude, who fall prostrate and

worship him as he approaches them. Triumphal arches of boughs and flowers are erected at intervals along the road of procession, which is strewn with new garments. People of inferior rank stand at an awful distance from the Guroo, lest he should inhale an atmosphere polluted by plebeian breath. A little ahead of the procession march a body of pioneers to clear the road of all obstacles, filling up unsightly hollows and levelling impertinent elevations.

This pomp and magnificence, however, belongs only to the pontiffs. The Guroos of inferior rank content themselves with an ordinary palanquin, a sorry horse, or a bullock; some being compelled to proceed on their own legs. But in general they rank as the first and most distinguished order of orthodox Hindoo society.

The principal object of these visitations, which sometimes extend through a circle of two hundred leagues, is to amass money. In addition to the fines levied on all transgressors of caste rules, the Guroos exact from their flocks a very considerable tribute, called the "offering at the feet."

The pontiff is inexorable in this demand. In vain does the poor, helpless man approach the haughty priest, stretching himself on the ground

in an attitude of abject humiliation, and begging him hard to abate something of his demand. His prayers are heard with scorn and indignation. He is loaded with reproaches and abuse in presence of his fellows, who are commanded to cast mud or cow-dung in his face.

If this ignominious treatment fails to succeed, the Guroo insists upon being supplied with a person to labour for the defaulter during a certain period, or until the money is paid. Occasionally, when it is found that the disciple is wholly incapable of complying with the demands of his avarice, a Guroo has been known to seize a part of his household goods or force away some member of his family in lieu of payment. Finally, he menaces the wretched being with his curse, which is an evil of such magnitude in the imagination of the priest-ridden Hindoo, that there is no degree of poverty or suffering to which he will not cheerfully submit rather than encounter it.

Extraordinary are the power and authority, both temporal and spiritual, which the dreaded Guroos hold. Like the Pope and his representatives, they profess to grant remission of sins by their benediction, or even by their look. The most trifling gift from their sacred hands is regarded

as of inestimable value. A flower, the leavings of their meals, a little cow-dung ashes, or the water in which they have washed their feet, are preserved as a holy relic or taken as a charm. The very touch of the Guroo is considered blessed, and is popularly believed to cure many diseases. In all matters of religious differences or disputes he is the supreme arbitrator. Nobody can be reinstated in his caste, which he has lost through transgressing some of its innumerable rules, except through the ministration of the Guroo. But sometimes our high priest comes across a tough customer, who gives him a good deal of trouble, which, however, he manages to get out of by the craftiness which is inherent in a Brahmin.

A Guroo was once making his visitation of a district, where one of his own caste was accused before him of having openly violated the rules respecting food, and even of turning them publicly into ridicule. The culprit was brought up before the Guroo, who had previously taken the evidence against him, and now decreed that he should be divested of his Brahminical cord. At this awful moment the man, apparently unmoved under so grievous a punishment, ad-

vanced to the middle of the assembly where the Guroo was seated, and after performing the *shashtángam*, or prostration, in the most respectful way, addressed his judge to the following effect:—

"So you, with your council, have decided that I am to be divested of my cord. It will be no great loss to me. Two bits of silver will get me another. But I desire to know what your motive can be for degrading me in this public manner. Is it because I have eaten meat? If that is the only reason, why does not the justice of a Guroo, which ought to be impartial, extend its severity alike over all offenders? Why should I be the only person accused out of so great a number of delinquents? I look on one side, and there I see two or three of my accusers, with whom I joined not long ago in devouring a good leg of mutton. Here, on the other side, I turn my eyes and I see some more of them, with whom I dined the other day at the house of a Sudra, where we cut up an excellent pullet. Allow me only to give their names, and I will also accuse many others whose consciousness has detained them from appearing at this assembly. But, if you

will allow me, I will instantly bring testimony of the facts and justify my accusation of the persons who enjoyed the mutton and the chicken as nicely as I did."

The Guroo felt himself out of his water. He evidently was puzzled how to proceed, after a discourse on so delicate a subject, and delivered with so much intrepidity. Besides, it was a serious financial question for the Guroo to out-caste so large a number of men who contributed to his prosperity. However, recovering himself, he cried out, with much presence of mind: "Who has brought this prattler here? Don't you see the fellow is mad? No sane Hindoo can utter such things as he has done. Turn him out, and let us be no longer tormented with his nonsense."

And in this happy way the Guroo extricated himself from considerable embarrassment.

SITTING IN DHARNÁ.

THE Brahmins have nowhere shown a more remarkable example of their cunning than in creating among their countrymen a belief that their persons were designed by God to be under all circumstances inviolable; and that to deprive them of life or to hurt their persons, directly or indirectly, is a crime that admits of no expiation. On this persuasion is founded the practice of sitting in *dharná* (arrest).

When a Brahmin desires to gain some point which he has found it impossible to accomplish in any other way, he goes to the door or house of the person against whom his suit is directed, and there he sits down in *dharná*, with poison or a poniard, or some other means of suicide, in his hand, threatening to use it should his adversary attempt to molest or pass him by.

This menace completely arrests him. The plaintiff now commences a fast in which, according to etiquette, he must be accompanied by the defendant; and in this situation they both remain until the former obtains satisfaction. The plaintiff rarely fails of his object; for were the individual thus arrested to permit the Brahmin to perish of hunger, or should he drive him to make use of any of his instruments of mischief, the sin would lie upon his head for ever.

Nor is the practice confined to male Brahmins. Some years ago a Brahmin widow at Benares had a law-suit with her brother-in-law which, in the first instance, went to arbitration. The suit involved a claim of property and a consideration of caste, the privileges of which her antagonist declared she had forfeited. The decision, though favourable to her, did not altogether satisfy the lady, who determined to carry the remaining points in dispute by *dharná*.

Accordingly she placed herself in the customary way at the door of her brother-in-law, who, apprehensive of her death, went with her to a temple, where they both made trial of their powers of abstinence for some time longer.

Thirteen days had elapsed when the defendant gave in. He agreed that, if the widow could establish the validity of her claims to caste, by prevailing on some respectable Brahmins to eat dinner with her at her own cost, he would not only pay all the expenses of the feast but her debts also. The conditions were accepted and fulfilled. But the brother-in-law refused to perform the last part of the engagement, which brought the matter under official notice.

Here is an older and a more striking example. Government having imposed a house-tax at Benares, the people, startled by the innovation, began to complain that they never heard of such a tax under the Moghuls; that their houses were their own; that the British rulers might next lay a tax on their wives and children. Representations were made to the Government at Calcutta, but in vain. Upon this the whole population of the city and its neighbourhood determined to sit in *dharná* until their grievances should be redressed. Some of the leading Brahmins sent written handbills to the wards in Benares, and to some of the adjoining villages, briefly setting forth the provocation and the necessity of the measures they were about to

adopt. They called on all lovers of their country and religion to join in the movement, and commanded, under bitter curses, every person who received the summons to hand it to his next neighbour. Three days afterwards about three hundred thousand persons left their houses, shut up their shops, suspended their farm-work, forbore to light fires or dress victuals, and many of them even to eat; and sat down, with folded arms and drooping heads, on the plain surrounding Benares.

The local government was much perplexed. There was the chance that some of those strange people might really perish, either from their obstinacy or from disease; while distress might ensue from the interruption of agricultural labour at the most critical time of the year. On the other hand, it was not expedient to yield to such a demand so urged. So they told the ringleaders, after some ineffectual reasoning, that if they chose to sit in *dharná* it was their own affair; that the Government would never yield to remonstrances so enforced; and that, so long as they only injured themselves and were peaceable in their behaviour to others, Government would not meddle with them. At the same time,

however, a strong body of troops was placed in the neighbourhood out of view.

Soon the multitude began to grow very hungry, and a thunder-shower made them wet, cold, and uncomfortable. Some of the party proposed a change of operations: that a deputation of 10,000 should be sent to address the Governor-General at Calcutta personally. A minority, thoroughly tired of their situation, rose to go home, but the remainder determined that all should go to the Governor-General, every man at his own charge. So about 15,000 Brahmins assembled with such provisions as they could collect and began their march. But dissensions spread fast amongst them, and hunger and fatigue told even on the most obstinate. In a few days they melted away to so small a number that the remainder were ashamed to proceed. Then the supreme Government wisely repealed the obnoxious tax; and thus ended a disturbance which, if it had been harshly or injudiciously managed, might have set all India in a flame.

Nowadays the practice of sitting in *dharná* is mostly confined to the fakeers. These pious beggars are remarkably obstinate, and will not move from the door of a person until their

demands are complied with, threatening suicide or self-torture. I remember well a number of fakeers who, a few years ago, sat round a huge fire which they lighted at the door of a house in which a grand funeral was being celebrated, threatening to put their arms into the flames if the present they demanded was denied to them. Some of them did actually burn the ends of their fingers. At last the master of the house gave them the money and got rid of them.

RELIGIOUS FEUDS.

SERIOUS riots took place last year in Northern India between Hindoos and Mahomedans through the clashing of their festivals. It so happened that the greatest religious festivals of the two races took place at the same time; and the simultaneous processions, which form a very important part of them, by the antagonistic communities, gave rise to the disturbances, in which the Mussulmans were said to be the aggressors.

The concurrence of the rival festivals is not very unusual, for the Mahomedan festivals are fixed according to the Muslim system of reckoning by lunar months, their year consisting of 354 days and a few hours, so that the Mahomedan New Year's Day happens every year about eleven days earlier than in the preceding year, thus shifting the feast-days continually; whereas

the Hindoos follow the luni-solar system, their months being pretty well fixed and their year consisting of about 365 days, so their festivals take place at nearly regular intervals. Hence once in every few years the Mohurrum of the Mahomedans clashes with the Dusserah of the Hindoos, which is celebrated in the autumn after the rains.

Mohurrum, or more properly Muharram—meaning "that which is forbidden," "anything sacred"—is the first month of the Mahomedan year, during the first ten days of which the Shiah Muslims lament the martyrdom of Husain, the second son of Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, by Ali; the tenth day only being observed by the Sunni Muslims, in commemoration of its having been the day on which Adam and Eve, heaven and hell, the pen, fate, life, and death were created. The ceremonies of the Mohurrum differ much in different places and countries; but the procession forms the most striking part of them in India. For two or three days the bows and arrows, the sword and spear, the standards and banners of Husain are carried through the streets, followed by richly-caparisoned horses, *tazias* borne over men's shoulders, and worshippers

loudly wailing and violently beating their chests, crying in a most piteous voice, "Wah Husain, wah Husain!"

The Dusserah of the Hindoos, on the other hand, is a joyful celebration, it being observed in commemoration of the victory of Rám over Rávan, the ten-headed monster and King of Ceylon, who abducted the beautiful and virtuous wife, Sitá, of the former. This festival lasts also for eight or ten days, processions forming a prominent part of it. Both communities are in a state of great excitement during these festivals, and the slightest contact of the rival parties sets fire to the perpetual, though smouldering, antagonism between the two creeds.

But not merely are the festivals of each an offence to the other; from the very nature of the Mahomedan and Hindoo faiths there is a standing feud between the Hindoo and Mahomedan races in India. To the Hindoo the cow is a sacred animal—the "milk-giving mother" of the family; while the Mahomedans not merely kill cows, but in the spirit of their image-breaking forefathers, do so publicly, and sometimes in the very street. And the Mahomedan butchers are too often dreadfully cruel in their mode of killing

cows. This the Hindoos cannot stand, not only because their religion forbids it, but for humanitarian reasons. And the Mahomedans, from the very nature of their religion, have always been aggressive and fanatical; while the Hindoos, unless grossly offended in their time-honoured sacred notions, do not care in the least to interfere with the religions of other peoples.

The celebrated Kooka trials of 1870 in the Punjaub arose from this cruel and obtrusive method of cow-killing adopted by the Mahomedans. In the middle of that year several Mahomedan cow-butchers were murdered in the Punjaub almost simultaneously, and the crimes appeared to be induced by a new Sikh sect known as the Kookas, who were special champions of the cow. A number of the Kookas were executed. But several suspicious circumstances, and the fact that a judge of Lahore who gave judgment against a Kooka was murdered as he was proceeding home, gave rise at the time to the impression that a general rising on the part of the Kookas was intended. A Mahomedan fakeer murdered the English secretary to the Municipality of Lahore at the same time. Thus a concerted plot of Sikhs and Mussulmans was

apprehended. But the real cause of the Kooka outbreaks was the cruel conduct of the Mahomedan butchers.

Here is an instance of the combustible nature of the Islamite faith. In 1874 a Parsee published in Gujratee a translation of Washington Irving's "Life of Mahomed." This was constructed into an attack on their Prophet by the Mahomedans of Bombay, and the regions generally where Gujratee is spoken. Becoming greatly excited, the Mussulman fanatics rushed out to wreak vengeance on the Parsee community. On the 13th of February the houses of the Parsees were sacked, the property destroyed, and the people cruelly abused and ill-treated. For fully two hours in the middle of the day the rioters worked their will without any police interference. Elegant houses were reduced to dust, and many people killed. For several days the riots continued; the Parsees retaliating, though finally outnumbered. The Government was apparently at its wits' end. A number of Arabs who landed from the sea at that time were supposed for the moment to have come by invitation. The Mussulman Mohurrum festival, too, was beginning. Altogether there were

reasons to fear the worst. At last troops arrived and the rioters rapidly disappeared.

As a curiosity the following examples may be cited to show how the antagonism of the rival communities is carried to minute details in some parts of India, especially where there is a large number of low-caste Hindoo converts. The Mahomedans button their chapkán, the upper garment, on the right, the Hindoos on the left. The latter at dinner-parties sit in rows, the former in circles. The poorer Hindoos put their eatables on the right side of the plantain-leaf which they use for plate, the Mahomedans place them on the other side.

BOYCOTTING IN INDIA.

BOYCOTTING, differing in some particulars from the way in which it is done in the land where the English term originated, has been practised for ages in India. There is this great difference between Irish and Hindoo boycotting: the former is based mainly on political, semi-political, or fiscal reasons; whereas the latter is practised on purely social or religious grounds. Then the Irish is severer than the Hindoo method in this sense, that no tradesman will sell anything to the boycotted man, who is more or less like a prisoner in his own house; whereas a boycotted Hindoo can buy anything anywhere or go to any place he likes, only people will not go to his house or associate with him or his family in any way.

On the other hand, the Hindoo is severer than the Irish boycotting in that the latter may be only

temporary, and raised at the caprice of the boycotters; whereas the former is often permanent, or can be done away with only by going through certain expiatory rites or costly ceremonies, which come hard even on the richer classes. A man may be boycotted in Ireland for no fault of his own; but in India boycotting follows upon a breach of observance of some time-honoured custom, or by any public offence against traditional notions of propriety.

Indian boycotting is allied to outcasting, but is quite distinct from it, and not half so severe. A man can lose his caste only by breaking one of its well-defined rules, which are quite different from mere customs or observances. An outcasted man is necessarily boycotted; but a boycotted man keeps his caste all right as long as he does not act against its rules. Again, a man may be outcasted, but not his family, for that reason; yet his relations will be boycotted if they associate with him.

Let me now cite some examples. Some years ago a learned Pandit gave his daughter in marriage when she was a few years older than the prescribed marriageable age amongst the Hindoos; and the offence was rendered doubly heinous

by the perpetrator being a Brahmin of high order. He was strictly boycotted accordingly; and, I believe, notwithstanding his great reputation as a scholar and a benevolent person, and in spite of his endeavour to propitiate the Brahmins in many ways, he is still avoided by orthodox Hindoos. A whole family has been boycotted for receiving and associating with one of its members who returned from England and had lost his caste through eating with Englishmen. One gentleman has been boycotted for ever for getting his widowed daughter married. If anybody's son or daughter-in-law associates with non-Hindoos publicly, the offending individual is outcasted, and the whole family is boycotted. If a son does not mourn for his deceased father in the prescribed manner, he is boycotted. In some parts of India men are boycotted for wearing trousers of European fashion—or, indeed, any dress that was not worn by their ancestors of a thousand years ago.

A well-known historical example of Hindoo boycotting is that of the Jeypore royal family, which was boycotted for hundreds of years by the other Rajpoot royal families for being the first Hindoo family of princely rank who offered

a daughter in marriage to a Moghul Emperor. In Rajputana whole tribes are often boycotted if somebody does not properly observe the traditional customs, or forms a connection with a lower caste or with non-Hindoos.

But nowadays boycotting can be raised in India by a judicious use of the almighty gold. I may mention a well-known case. A distinguished Hindoo gentleman and merchant of a large Indian town was boycotted for reforming propensities. His old orthodox mother, who lived in the country, on the occasion of a religious festival directed the servants, as usual, to distribute offerings of rice, fruits, and sweetmeats among the Brahmins of the neighbourhood. To a man, they refused to accept the same, on the ground that her son was deserting his caste. The old lady was deeply chagrined, and began to be mortally afraid of the destination of her soul after death. On hearing this, her son went down to his country house, and ordered the servants to take the offerings again to the Brahmins, this time placing five rupees on each of the plates. The expedient answered wonderfully well. The very Brahmins who a few hours before had turned away the servants ignominiously,

now came running to the merchant's house and literally scrambled for the presents. This story seems to justify the saying of another rich Hindoo that "caste was in his iron chest."

Boycotting and outcasting are made doubly oppressive to Hindoo women, and for the most trifling reasons. A married woman not putting the *sindoor* (a red powder) on the parting of her hair is boycotted. In the country, if a mother-in-law eats or lives in the house of her son-in-law before her daughter has a child, she will be at once boycotted. A young married lady was boycotted for not observing some ceremony at the birth of her child. A man can regain his caste by performing the expiatory rites; but an outcasted woman, especially if she has broken away from the zenana or associated with non-Hindoos, is never taken back to her caste.

THE BAID, OR DOCTOR.

IN a small country town in India a well-to-do merchant lies ill of fever. He has fasted for two days and taken every care of himself, but he does not seem to get any better. Nevertheless he thinks that his fever is of a slight character, and that it will go off by fasting a day or two more. So he continues to abstain from food, rarely touching one or two thin chupatties (flat flour-cakes) and tasting a few drops of water. Two more days are over; yet there is no remission of the fever. His family become alarmed, and are about to call in medical aid.

But just at the moment a gray-haired neighbour drops in and counsels the patient not to take drugs at this stage, but to let the fever rise as high as it can; for if it be checked too early he will suffer longer. Fasting should be

tried for three days more, at the expiration of which time the patient will come round. So our fever-stricken merchant, listening to his old trusty friend, hopefully goes through another three days' starvation. But all his fasting does not kill the fever, which, on the contrary, gets worse and worse. His condition becomes too serious for his family to wait any longer. The patient, however, whines all the time that if it is "written on his forehead" that he shall die, nothing in the world can do him any good. His young brother, taking no heed of his plaint, starts early next morning to call in the Baid, the only physician of the place.

The Baid of the town has got a reputation as a first-class physician. The people believe that if any man can snatch one from the grasp of death it is he. He is unsurpassed in the diagnosis of diseases. He has mastered the original medical treatises in Sanskrit, which are believed to be inspired. As to European medicines, the Baid considers all that mere stuff, and he is convinced that European doctors do not understand Indian diseases. He admits their superiority in surgery; but then, in his opinion, surgery is not a function for a learned doctor: cupping and

bleeding, and all such business, belong to the low-caste barber. Physiology he despises; he entirely relies on his thorough acquaintance with the inspired treatises.

Besides the store of knowledge which the Baid carries in his head, he has got a little laboratory of his own. There he has collected various herbs and roots, the ingredients of several excellent aperients, twenty-one metallic medicines, thirty-three kinds of cobra-poison, and a hundred and one curative oils. And then our Baid is a master-hand at the pulse. Display he abominates, and he is never in a hurry; which, he says, is the infallible characteristic of a madman. His neighbours have never known him to make a mistake; and if many of his patients have died, they did not strictly follow his advice: and then who can resist the inevitable fate?

On the earnest entreaty of the brother the Baid consents to accompany him, but not before he has asked a great many questions and seriously complained about the interference with his experiments on the cobra-poisons. He takes about two hours to get ready for the start.

Arriving at the patient's house, he serenely enters the sick man's room and sits beside him

with great dignity and composure. The servant offers him the hookah, at which he gently pulls as, tenderly taking hold of the patient's arm, he feels his pulse. After the consumption of ten minutes in this operation he asks a few questions of the sufferer, and then examines his tongue. He finds the patient in strong fever. Taking up a piece of paper he scratches on it a few mysterious words, ordering a simple diet of lentil soup, with bits of a chupatty thrown in. Before the Baid departs he makes the sick man swallow a couple of pills—which he takes out of a little box he carries about him—mixed with the juice of betel-leaf. There is no offering of the fee now. Another pull at the hookah, a few cheering words to the patient and his brother, and exit Mr. Baid as serenely as he came in.

The prescription is taken to the spice-merchant, who is also the only druggist of the town. The spice-merchant scratches his head and tries to decipher the hieroglyphics. Keeping the servant waiting outside, he enters his sanctum and takes an hour or more in preparing the drugs, for which he charges a few pence.

But all drugs are not prepared by the spice-

seller. The simplest ones are made up by the patients themselves: this is always the case with the poor. Medicines that need much care and nicety in preparing are made up by the physician himself, and high prices charged for them. In Bengal there are no drug-sellers to prepare the prescriptions of orthodox doctors; and the Baids (who for some inscrutable reason are there called Kavirájes, or lords of poets) always carry a miniature dispensary with them and prepare the drugs in the patient's house. The Mahomedan druggists, who prepare the prescriptions of Hakeems, or Mahomedan doctors, do not deal in spices, but sell rose-water, attar, and various juices besides drugs. There is one great difference between the two systems: where the Mahomedan doctor applies cooling medicines, the Hindoo uses heating ones.

The Baid finds the healing art a sorry profession. His fee is about two shillings on the first visit; and he continues to attend twice daily until the patient recovers, when he gets two or three shillings more, and perhaps a suit of clothes or some other present. The highest fee for the complete cure of a case in a rich family would be £2; and a reward like that

might be looked for once in six months. And what with the poor fees and the competition of doctors trained in European systems, their lot is hard indeed. Some of the Baids practise their art gratis, and some freely distribute medicines to the poor. Sometimes the Baid is swindled out of his fee by ungrateful patients, who slink away from his presence lest they should be reminded of the obligation.

But the clever physician has his revenge sometimes. Visiting a slippery patient, he casts his eye on some pretty thing about him—a valuable hookah or a gold ring. "Oh! how pretty this is," says the Baid; "where did you get it?" "I got it from such a place or So-and-so," replies the patient. The physician steadily eyes the article, saying, "How I should like to have one like it." "You can take this one, if it suits you," timidly says the owner, out of mere politeness. "Oh, you will be put to inconvenience by parting with it, I am sure." "No, not at all; you are quite welcome to take it," replies the patient, looking with soft eyes at the article. Upon which the Baid, unmasking himself, orders his accompanying servant to take the thing home with him.

In some cases the patient, finding himself the worse for the treatment of his Baid, gets desperate, and, resigning himself into the hands of the astrologers, repairs to the Ganges, where he drenches himself with its water, which soon finishes him off. This has been recently illustrated in the case of the late Maharajah of Scindiah. In some parts of India the young men call the Baids "killers of men," classifying them into "killers of hundred," "killers of thousand," and so on. A great many of the Baids are very ignorant, and commit fearful havoc among the superstitious people. Their race, however, is disappearing fast.

Nevertheless there are a few Baids who have been known to effect wonderful cures, especially in chronic cases of asthma, phthisis, dysentery, etc. And, notwithstanding their ignorance, they have successfully treated cases where European physicians gave up the patients. No doubt this is partly owing to the European doctors not understanding the constitution and the mode of living of their Hindoo patients.

A curious cure of asthma is recorded of a European who derived little benefit from the treatment of his own countrymen. A Baid

offered to cure him when his case had become almost hopeless. The European laughed. However, getting quite desperate, he submitted to the treatment of the Hindoo doctor; and the few sweet black pills which he administered wrought a complete cure. The grateful patient begged his doctor to name his own reward; but he would listen to nothing of that kind, nor would he tell of what ingredients the pills were composed. Indeed, this the Baids will never do.

GHEE.

WHAT is ghee? How is it used by the natives of India? And why is its adulteration with cows' or pigs' fat so obnoxious to them? Clear answers to these questions will bring home to Englishmen the cause of the occasional agitations about ghee in India.

Ghee is prepared by boiling fresh-drawn milk in earthen pots for an hour or more, and adding, after it has cooled, a little curdled milk. The curdled mass is then churned for half-an-hour, some hot water is added, and the churning continued for half-an-hour longer, when the butter forms. This butter is then boiled until all the watery particles and curds have been thrown off by repeated skimmings. The clear oil is poured into a vessel to cool, and the granulated mass thus formed is ghee.

It is kept in earthen pots, and sold in grocers' shops at the rate of two to three pounds for a rupee. If well made, ghee will keep good for years; losing its flavour somewhat, but not its properties, which improve with age. In some old families you will find ghee over a hundred years old buried underground in earthen jars. Instances are known of the preservation of ghee, without taint, for two hundred years, and even longer. Ghee is an article of great commercial importance in many parts of India, being exported to all the sea-coast of Eastern and Southern Asia to the extent of 400 to 500 tons annually. According to the statistical authorities, 1,236,433 lb. of ghee were exported from India in the year 1879–80.

All but the poorest classes in India, whether Hindoos or Mahomedans, use ghee for ordinary cooking purposes. Where the English cook uses butter, suet, or lard, the Indian uses ghee. In frying potatoes, in cooking dál, in making sweetmeats, in preparing tasteful dishes, the upper and middle classes always use ghee; which is also rubbed over chupatties, the flat flour-cakes serving for bread, and poured over rice at the time of eating. One of the secrets of the fine

flavour of Indian-made curries is the use of good ghee. And neither Hindoos nor Mahomedans will touch any food that is cooked with ghee which they believe to be adulterated with pigs' or cows' fat.

Besides its ordinary uses, ghee is taken for medicinal purposes. Taken with hot milk it acts as a strong aperient; and, from its soothing and cooling properties, it is rubbed over the body by fasting people. Old ghee occupies a prominent place in the pharmacopœia of the Hindoos, who consider it the best remedy for asthma and bronchitis, and order it to be rubbed on the chest in cases of whooping-cough. Applied in a similar way, it greatly alleviates pain in rheumatism, gout, etc. The older the ghee is the better it is prized, and the more quickly it acts. And for all these purposes ghee must be absolutely free from all extraneous matter.

Ghee is believed by the Hindoos to be the purest eatable thing under the sun. The widow, who is forbidden to partake of all luxurious food, is allowed to take ghee with her simple bread or rice. The self-denying jogees, sunnyasis, and other ascetics sometimes live on nothing but

ghee. At weddings, funerals, and on other grand occasions, public dinners must be given, or the offending party will be punished by excommunication from caste. Most of the dishes that are served at these banquets are prepared with ghee. At many festivals alms consisting of rice, dál, and sweetmeats are given to Brahmins; and these sweetmeats must be cooked in ghee. The food set before the Brahmins at feast-times mainly consists of sweetmeats, in the preparation of which ghee enters largely. At cremations ghee is poured over the corpse and on the funeral pyre.

But the most sacred use of ghee is its offering to the gods, who are supposed by the Hindoos to have a great predilection for this article. Besides the deities in the temples and shrines, to whom ghee must be offered, every strict Hindoo has got his tutelary god at home, whom he worships every day. Sandal-wood and toolshee-leaf are placed before the image, and incense is burned before it in a little cup, the contents of which are then thrown over the idol. This incense is a compound of sandal, *dhoop* (another fragrant wood), camphor, ghee, and one or two other things. And then the god must be fed with sweetmeats cooked

in ghee. For the worship of all kinds of deities the Hindoo must use ghee, which is also the chief thing in *jágs* and *homs*, or burnt-offerings.

To be reinstated in caste, which a Hindoo may have lost by breaking one or other of its innumerable rules, he must go through some solemn expiatory rites; with a free distribution of money to Brahmins and others, of course. One of them is that he must solemnly eat in public five articles connected with the cow—ghee, curd, milk, and two others which I shall not mention.

From all this it will be evident to what degree ghee is useful and sacred to the Hindoos, and why it must be pure in all cases. To adulterate it with an admixture of the fat of animals which are abominations in the eyes of the Hindoos, is not only to debase its quality and render it unfit for culinary and medicinal purposes for fear of losing caste, which is so precious to them, but also to make it loathsome to the Brahmins who must be propitiated, and to the gods who must be worshipped, with ghee.

INDIAN GIPSIES.

WHATEVER may be the theory as to the origin of the Gipsies, the same physical and moral characteristics mark them all over the world; and in their temporary huts in India you see, under a darker complexion, the same tall, slender figure, fine limbs, large, black, brilliant eyes, lowering forehead shaded by long hair curled at the extremities, as distinguish the Gipsies strolling on a common in England.

The men of this race in India are fantastically dressed, wearing large turbans and loose upper garments of all colours; but the women, though tawdrily dressed and disfigured with ornaments in the colder regions, frequently go about in the plains with nothing beyond a ragged cloth round the waist to cover their beautiful forms, whose fine contour and perfect symmetry make them the

most desirable models for the sculptor or the painter. The latter are handsome when young, but they age too quickly, owing to their constant exposure to the hot sun, and to their habit of suckling children until they are five or six years old. To the children, who are always quite naked, the Gipsy mothers are very kind, feeding them well and taking great care of their health. They are taught at their mothers' breasts the arts of begging and thieving, which, with their indolent and vagrant habits, form the prominent features of the Gipsy character in India, as in any other country.

Gipsies are found in every part of India; in the Deccan, where they form one of the wild tribes, in Bengal, in the upper provinces, and even in Cashmere. They go about in companies, erecting temporary huts with light mats of sedge or rushes wherever they encamp. In Northern India, the little encampments of these people are frequently very regular and neat, being formed entirely by rushes. Each apartment, though of about the size of a mastiff's kennel, has its own particular courtyard or enclosure, which gives a quaint appearance to the whole portable hamlet. One cannot help wondering at the sight of a large

number of men, women, and children, with cats, dogs, cows, and other domestic animals, living and moving about in so few small, mean huts, patched anyhow with boughs and rushes, which are the only protection against the scorching sun or the drenching rains.

In India Gipsies are known by a variety of names, which indicate the different professions they pursue. In some part they are called Bedyás; or quacks; in others, Nats, or dancers; in others again, Kanjars, a class of people who make ropes, etc., and eat the flesh of horses and other animals not eaten by the Hindoos; while in the upper provinces they are invariably called Bázigars, or players. The last perambulate the country in bands as strolling players, athletes, or jugglers, hiring their services for a stated period, generally a year, to a sirdar, or manager. The men, who are remarkably athletic, practise not only juggling in all its branches, but perform feats demanding the greatest agility and strength. Even the women, besides excelling in their natural profession of dancing, go through tumbling and other acrobatic performances with remarkable ease and gracefulness. And to be proficient in these they are

put through violent exercises in their childhood, which is also another reason why their youth and beauty fade so fast. Many of the men earn their living by leading about dancing bears or monkeys; many more by collecting medicinal herbs, and by catching *mungooses*, squirrels, and the bird *dalto*, which they use as food or medicine. The women practise also physic, cupping, palmistry, and tattooing. Furnished with a quantity of herbs, dried birds, and other curious things, they sally forth in the morning from their huts to ply their trades among the women of the neighbouring villages, returning to their encampment as soon as the sun sets. Should they not return before the jackal's cry is heard in the evening the men, becoming fidgety, go in search of them, and if they have reasons to suspect the fidelity of their wives, punish them severely, sometimes in presence of the villagers. Many Gipsies take to the arts of stealing and robbing, while others spend their days in doing nothing but lolling about in the sun, and begging from people whom chance may bring in their way, for they are too lazy to go up to them. In fact, they will do no work at all so long as they can help it; and when

they do employ themselves in anything, they take great care to shirk every kind of work that requires labour and steadiness.

Juggling is the principal occupation of the majority of the Indian Gipsies, and it suits wonderfully their tricky nature. In sleight-of-hand, in the arts of petty magic, in rope-dancing, and in such other performances, they maintain their excellence as of yore. Men, women, and children all take an equal part in these conjuring tricks.

In many villages, and even in some towns, you notice of an afternoon a group of gaudily-dressed men and women, accompanied by naked children, passing along slowly, beating tom-toms, singing curious songs, and carrying bamboos, bags, and tripods, or leading a huge black bear, perhaps the eldest of the party holding carelessly enough a stick, from which is slung in a dirty cloth, like a hammock, an infant, the youngest of the quaint group, followed by a large crowd of boys and girls and grown-up idlers—these are the juggling Gipsies bent on a profitable tour. They always sing loudly with the accompaniment of the noisy toms-toms as they perform; the head of the party violently gesticulating, and jabbering

in a jargon all the time. And he always heralds his feats by a song like the following:—

"I from lovers tokens bear;
I can flowery chaplets weave,
Amorous belts can well prepare,
And with courteous speech deceive;
Joint-stool feats to show I'm able;
I can make the beetle run
All alive upon the table,
When I show delightful fun.
At my sleight-of-hand you'll laugh,
At my magic you will stare.
I can play at quarter-staff;
I can knives suspend in air;
I enchantment strange devise,
And with cord and sling surprise."

The Gipsies in India who are known by the name of Bázigars, or players, are divided into seven castes; all, however, intermarrying and professing to be descended from the same family. Most of them are converts to Islamism, a few professing a kind of Hindooism; but they are said to regard as their tutelary divinity the celebrated Hindoo musician Tánsen, who flourished in the time of Akbar. Some Gipsies are very accommodating in the matter of their religion, always professing the religion of the village near which they happen to be encamped; though it

is believed by some that, among themselves, the fiery Hindoo goddess, Káli, is the real object of their worship. One common bond that binds them together is thieving and begging, and another is a secret language of their own—they use quite a different jargon when talking to strangers—which is said to be understood by Gipsies only, and all over the world.

In Northern India the Gipsies derive their notions of morals and religion principally from the songs of the great weaver-poet Kabir, who was contemporary with Sher Shah. Kabir was a Sufi, and cherished the most exalted sentiments of piety and benevolence; and his poems breathe so fine a spirit of toleration and hospitability towards all men, inculcating the purest morality, that both Hindoos and Mahomedans venerate his memory and claim him as one of their own. The stanzas of this bard are for ever in the mouths of the Gipsies, who, to any question respecting their opinions on morality and religion, reply in the universally esteemed verses of Kabir, than whom there have been very few better moral instructors in this world. So, if the Gipsies have fallen so low in character, and in moral and religious principles and practices, if they happen

to be the most tricky and dishonest people, the fault must be attributed to their nature, and to nothing else.

According to the doctrines they at present profess, every man's soul is after death absorbed in the universal spirit, of which it is a particle. Like the epicureans of ancient Greece, they believe that feasting, drinking, and being merry constitute their supreme duty in this life. With them every kind of crime may be expiated by plentiful libations, except, perhaps, the betrayal of their secrets and private opinions to strangers, which is severely punished by the elders.

Singularly enough, even the Mahomedan Gipsies call in the Brahmin astrologer to fix a lucky name for their children.

In their habits the Gipsies in India are far more uncleanly than the lowest Hindoos or Mahomedans, devouring all kinds of food, even the dead bodies of jackals, bullocks, and horses.

Their customs are quite curious. Before marriage no restraint is put upon the passions of either the men or women; and, as the latter choose their own husbands and are not obliged to marry early, they are believed to be faithful to their marriage vows. The young man and

young woman having agreed between themselves and fixed on a day for the marriage, the former, accompanied by all his relations, male and female, proceeds to the hut of the bride, whose relations at first meet him with a mock refusal. Finding him pertinacious, they relent, and in a few moments give up the girl, saying, "Here is your bride, behave kindly to her." Whereupon the bridegroom marks her forehead with *sindoor*, a red powder (a Hindoo custom), exclaiming, "This woman is my wedded wife!" The bride then goes through a similar rite, repeating a similar form of words; after which they sit down together, joining their hands. A Bacchanalian banquet, following upon a few other unimportant ceremonies, finishes the wedding. The Gipsies bury their dead, and the only ceremony they seem to observe on the occasion is to get completely drunk and thus forget their sorrows.

STORY-TELLING.

FROM the earliest times listening to stories told by clever narrators has been one of the favourite amusements of the people of India. Princes and peasants, men and women, old and young —all take an equal delight in it. And the stories are told with such marvellous effect, that one can hardly conceive the pleasure in hearing them, unless one belongs to the same country and to the same people as the story-tellers.

It is well known that many of the stories current in Europe have come all the way from India, and that many a tale which the fair-haired children of the cold North enjoy in silence, when told with the accompaniment of proper intonation and gesture, sets the bright black eyes of the dusky faces on the banks of

the Ganges sparkling with fun and merriment. They may vary in localities and other minor circumstances, but the same leading idea pervades all the variants, and in almost every case they develop and terminate similarly.

Story-telling, as understood in India and other countries of the East, is also practised in Europe. In Naples and other towns in Southern Italy, however, it is confined to professionals only, but you meet in India story-tellers both professional and amateur, male and female, of all ages and conditions.

First comes the professional story-teller. In the establishments of Princes and men of rank and wealth a number of professed story-tellers are always found, who amuse them and their women when melancholy or indisposed, vexed or tired; and they are generally employed to lull them to sleep. In large halls, erected for the purpose, the men of rank and their friends and courtiers sit enraptured round the respected narrator, as he recites with proper action the thrilling tales which are based on legends and traditions of the most distinguished deeds of their remote ancestors; while the female story-teller beguiles the tedium of the ladies in the

inner apartments with fairy tales and love stories. Or in the serene evenings, on the flat roofs of their houses, or in the breezy verandas, the gentlemen assemble to listen to the romantic narratives which charm and soothe them after the scorching summer days.

The martial Rájpoot, after that most exciting of all sports—pig-sticking—repairs to his shady tent, and forgets his hairbreadth escapes and terrible adventures in the charms of the story-teller's art, as he soothes his wearied limbs with the fumes of tobacco or opium. Rich imagery often, indeed, embellishes these tales, but no embroidery of the imagination entirely conceals the ground-work of truth that underlies them; and much rational information is discovered, not only in the more serious traditions, but also amidst the amusing wildness of the romantic fables.

The professed story-tellers are not confined within the walls of palaces, or the houses of the rich. In the coffee-houses, in the courts of the caravanserais, in the streets, near the bazaars—in fact, wherever a knot of people are collected together for the purpose of amusement, the story-teller generally makes one of the party.

Even in the desert, when the warlike shepherds, returned from desperate foray, or halting by a date-grove or fountain after a long march, sit down at their tent-doors in the evening, the talents of the story-teller are put in requisition.

In the inns for travellers the professed story-teller is always a welcome guest. He enters them with a cheerful and dignified mien, all conversation is hushed in a moment, a seat is provided for him in the centre, and the clustered inmates eagerly listen to his romantic and pathetic stories. He intersperses them with verses and songs, and he never forgets rhyme and rhythm even in the plainer passages of his narrations. His manner is easy and animated by turns; he delivers himself as if he were the hero of his own stories; he indulges freely in gesture, and mimics the voices of the principal characters. And when his plate gets full of coppers, he winds up his stories with a benedictory verse, and, making a profound salaam, retires.

These story-tellers, most of whom cannot read a line in a book, and make a blotted

scrawl when required to sign their names, often conduct large businesses, and make comfortable fortunes. Their hearers are as unlettered as they; but it must be remembered that among sensitive inhabitants of hot climates intellectual pleasure is not confined to those who can read books. And the best of these stories is that they give a truer picture of the manners and beliefs of the people than can be found in all the writers, both native and foreign.

There are men and women all over the country who have the talent of story-telling, but who do not resort to it as a means of livelihood. Even in the small villages there is to be found a widow, who supports herself by spinning thread, telling wonderful tales to the children of the place. As soon as the shades begin to approach, young boys and girls drop into her hut and coax the old woman to tell them stories. They would not go to any other person, for they know her to be the best story-teller in the village; and the widow knows it too. Sometimes she pretends to be ill, at others she really feels very tired. But the little people must have a story from "auntie," as they call her.

So the old woman lights her rickety lamp and tells the children to sit in a group before her. She turns her spinning-wheel as she begins her yarn; her juvenile hearers sit motionless like little statues. But when she comes to a ludicrous or pathetic part, their eyes sparkle and they break out in hilarious laughter, or their lips fall and they look sad.

The widow's stories generally turn upon the adventures of kings, queens, warriors, merchants, and upon that most fascinating of all subjects—ghosts. They generally end in a moral, either in the punishment of the bad or in the prosperity of the good. In the more affecting and exciting scenes she would drop the handle of the wheel from her right hand and the cotton from her left, raise or lower her voice, and make gestures suitable to the narrative.

But the most interesting sight is when she recites her ghost stories, of which her small auditors must have one at least every evening. Here she is at her best. Coming to the approach of the ghost, she lets go her wheel, hushes her voice into a whisper, and affects such a nasal twang to imitate the talk of the ghost that her young

listeners go into a state of great fright. They draw towards each other, they nestle close round the widow, their faces turn pale, their black eyes become lustreless, their hair stands on end, and the weak ones begin to shiver. And when they take leave of her after the story, they talk in whispers, and walk home with their arms firmly clasped in each other's, the boldest of the company reaching home the last. They bring their merry faces back again, however, next evening, and also some oil and sweetmeats for the widow, the result of good-natured theft at their own homes.

Last comes the family story-teller. In every respectable family there happens to be somebody who has the happy knack of telling stories smartly. The grandmother generally fills up this not very enviable post for the children of the house. The usual time for telling stories is just after they go to bed. I remember well how we three little brothers, directly we turned in, used to persuade our grandmother to tell us some fresh story when she was so tired that she could hardly keep her eyes open. But we would not go to sleep without a story. So poor grandmother

was obliged to give us one out of her inexhaustible store, and we went to sleep listening to it. And thus we managed to extract from her every evening a fresh story; at least she made us believe all her stories were fresh. Grandmother used to cheat us sometimes by tacking together bits of old stories, and passing it off as a fresh one. But we were too sharp for her; we used to find out her tricks, and make her tell a story afresh. Of course, most of these stories are as old as the hills, but one can, by cleverly manipulating them, make them appear like new ones. So, really, grandmother used to charm us to sleep most evenings with old stories dressed up in a novel style.

Listening to stories becomes a confirmed habit with some people, so that even when their hair turns gray they eagerly long for a fresh narrative. For my own part I must confess that, stuffed as I have been with foreign things from my infancy, and living out of the Storyland for years, I have a strange leaning towards good stories. I must also say that I enjoy a good story well told far more than any of your modern tedious three-volume novels. Perhaps when my eyes will grow dim, my

fingers begin to shake, and I prepare to bid adieu to this world, I shall long to sit on the banks of the Ganges and listen to one of those wonderful Indian story-tellers.

PUPPET-SHOWS.

THE children of a large house in an Indian town, coming home from school on a winter afternoon, hear whispers of something very interesting to them from the servants at the door. Flinging away their satchels, they race up to their mother, taking hold of whose arms they all ask at the same time whether there is really going to be a puppet-show that evening at their house. Mamma, with her eyes turned away, does not say "Yes," neither says "No;" but tells her little ones to make less noise. The quick young people at once understand what mamma means, and rush to all parts of the house—one to the street-door, one to the roof, another to the outer veranda, and the fourth to the window at the back; wherefrom, with sparkling eyes and beaming

countenances, they announce to anybody they see the grand event of the evening.

Within a few minutes a crowd of chattering children collects at the door of the house, awaiting the arrival of the showmen. As soon as the shades approach, a huge package makes its appearance, borne along over the heads of two stalwart coolies and accompanied by four men. Brought to the courtyard, the package is deposited on one side, the coolies are dismissed, and the showmen, requesting the children to go away for a little while, erect a temporary screen, behind which they prepare the stage and its accessories, while the servants spread carpets over the courtyard.

The puppet-stage is generally very small, and has to be almost on a level with the ground, whereon the spectators squat in the Indian fashion. It is, however, very neatly got up by means of bamboos, sticks, bamboo mats, and other such materials, and, when finished up with white and coloured sheets and hung with little lanterns, it makes a pretty sight. The scenery, though of a simple description, is neat and tasteful; and the wooden figures, which are worked by means of wires or strings, are always bright and freshly

painted. They are gaily dressed, too; a brilliant pictorial effect being the chief aim of the proprietor. Great ingenuity is spent in making the complexion and features of the marionettes correspond with those of the characters they represent, so that you can tell at a glance which is the valiant hero of kingly race and which the disreputable villain of low caste.

The mechanism of the figures displays equal ingenuity. The buffoon can move almost every part of his body; he can shut and open his eyes, open his mouth, stride across the stage, and twist his figure in many ways. The chief characters can turn and nod their heads, raise their arms, and bend the body, so as to be able to salute in the proper fashion. The inferior personages are allowed much less freedom of movement, and there are a number of puppets who pass on and off the stage without the least gesticulation. Two men set the figures in motion from behind the scene, talking for the puppets in a whistling and squeaking manner; while two other men sit in front of the stage, singing and playing musical instruments between the acts, and sometimes giving the dialogue or explaining what is going on.

A puppet-show in India is intended mainly for young children; but grown-up young men invariably smuggle themselves into the dark corners of the courtyard, while the rustling of flowing dresses, and the noise of subdued talking and laughing behind the screens in the veranda above, indicate that the ladies take as much interest in the marionettes as their young ones do. Then there must be some men to keep order among the children; and usually, a keen competition for this office takes place among the elderly folk of the house. Of course they cannot help looking on at the fun before them. At every burst of merriment among the youngsters, the master of the house comes from his chamber, his friends accompanying him, and tells the noisy children to be a little quieter: and he too cannot help glancing at the puppet-show. And so everybody in the house finds himself, somehow or other, looking at it. The proprietor of the show knows this well enough, and accordingly adapts his programme to the taste of both sexes and all ages.

One of the commonest pieces acted is the old, old story of Rám and Rávana, which never seems to tire the patience of the Hindoos.

The abduction of Sitá; the march for her rescue; the virtuous queen's prison in the groves of Ceylon; the fight between Rám and Rávana; the slaying of the ten-headed monster; and the triumphant bringing home of his wife by the heroic King of Oudh, are very cleverly represented on the puppet-stage. The characters which give the greatest pleasure to the juvenile spectators are the monkey-allies of Rám, who, in the midst of the marches and battles, have a trick of grinning and making faces at the children, which sets the latter shrieking and shouting.

Another favourite character, and a useful one to the proprietor of the show, is the crazy beggar. This personage cannot go through his antics until he is supplied with a little food; and the man in front explains this to the children, who thereupon throw some coppers to him. The beggar has lately married, and he will not show his pretty young wife unless the little gentlemen give him some presents: which brings another shower of coppers.

Another favourite exhibition by means of puppets is the Court of the Great Akbar. First come the sweepers and other domestics to pre-

pare the place for holding a grand durbar; then appear, in their proper order, the principal Nawabs and Rajahs of the Emperor's time; after which the great Moghul Emperor enters in state, mounted on a richly-caparisoned elephant. The durbar over, a dancing-girl is brought out, who goes through the usual performances of the nautch. Then other puppets are introduced: a Baniyá with his bundle, and a thief to steal it; a Dhobee washing clothes in a river, and a crocodile pulling him away by his leg; and so on.

After the puppet-show is over, two of the showmen, perhaps, appear on the stage—one dressed as a young European officer and the other as his servant. The former has his cheeks painted a glowing vermilion colour, and is attired in the most exact military costume, with red jacket, stiff collar, white trousers, boots and spurs.

In the first scene the young officer walks the servant up and down the room, haranguing him in broken Hindustani, which is thickly interlarded with phrases like "Tum gudda hai" ("You are an ass"), and giving him a cuff now and then. In the next scene the young officer is represented

in a rather elevated state, helping himself to tumblerfuls of brandy-and-water from a bottle and a jug on a table before him, his servant standing behind him mute and still, with his hands folded. With a jerk the sahib rises from his chair, and, holding a glass of brandy-and-water unsteadily in his hand, commands the servant to drink it then and there. The poor fellow does not know what to do, makes wry faces, salaams to the ground, and begs to be excused; but his master will have him drink, and he does so at last; whereupon the young officer, taking hold of the servant's hands, begins to dance, giving him now and then a box on the ear to correct his steps or to quicken his pace. In the third and last scene the young officer and his wife, tawdrily dressed in white with bonnet to match, walk arm-in-arm in a strutting manner.

They then dance a minuet, which brings the performance to a close. The whole exhibition takes about three hours.

These showmen mimic and caricature the manners of Anglo-Indians most cleverly. Sometimes, especially in the country, they finish up the puppet-show by representing a sheep-dance, at which a number of them skip on all-fours like

sheep; and a fowl-dance, at which they sit upon their hams, and, putting one hand over their head to imitate the beak of a fowl, hop about, pecking at one another. This amuses the rustics exceedingly. In the villages the puppet-show is held in the market-place or in the zemindar's house; and there the grown-up people are not at all shy of attending it.

The puppet-showmen are paid from one rupee to four or five rupees for each performance; and then there are the extra coppers, which amount to a respectable sum. These men form a distinct class; they are born and bred in the profession, and may be either Hindoos or Mahomedans, though more often they are the former, the show itself being of Hindoo origin.

The puppet-plays of the Hindoos, like their operatic performances, can be traced to the same source as the earlier drama in England—the representation of set historical pieces being their chief aim—and a constant intermixture of pathos and humour is common to all. It is in the mechanism of the figures that the great superiority of the Indian puppet lies. As I have said before, some of them can move almost every limb—walk, dance, kneel down, stoop, wink. I have never

seen a proper puppet-show anywhere out of India; but, from the accounts I have read of the Italian and German puppet-shows, I believe the Indian exhibitions beat them in the mechanism of the figures, in variety of entertainment, and in the general get-up. I only hope, indeed, that my countrymen will devote a part at least of the time and ingenuity they spend in these petty shows to more solid and useful pursuits.

THE MIMIC.

OF all the people who contribute to relieve the dull monotony of country and even town life in some parts of India, the most curious are the professional mimics. Their wonderful power of imitating the voices of birds, beasts, and men, their great skill in painting and dressing themselves so as to exactly simulate the appearance of different characters — of men and women, boys and girls, natives and Europeans, their marvellous ability to mimic the gestures and attitudes of all sorts of people in their various moods, and their peculiar mode of operations and of collecting fees for the representations, mark them out as quite unique among the public entertainers in India.

In the country the mimics travel from one

village to another, living in tents or lodgings, or as welcome guests of shop-keepers, who, in high appreciation of their peculiar merit, will for a little or no consideration gladly give them a share of their rooms. They rarely make several appearances together in the same house or place, and they take great care to go about wrapped in a sheet or otherwise disguised, for their great art is to keep up the deception in their impersonations until they finish the whole series in different parts of the village.

The special season for this kind of entertainment is winter, when the evenings are long and cheerless; though some mimics are not particular as to what time of the year they pay their round of visits, as long as they can surprise you by appearing all of a sudden one evening representing a well-known character. In the towns, perhaps, the same man will visit a rich man's house once in a month or so, impersonating successively a rajah, a beggar, a policeman, a thief, a boor, a pandit, etc.; and it will be a long time before you can make out his identity. And even if you did find him out soon you would admire his skill none the less; for, poor and uneducated as he is, his

resources and cleverness in representing, with almost the precision of a Paris detective, characters that are widely different from each other, are truly wonderful.

The Indian mimic never bargains for his fee nor asks for it each time he pays you a visit, but waits until he has finished a whole series, when, coming in his natural appearance and his own dress, he thankfully accepts whatever you please to give him. A very clever mimic earns in towns as much as 200 rupees in a year, but his art is getting out of fashion there; in the villages an ordinary mimic manages to scrape together about £8 or £10 in the same time.

There are some minor mimics who can imitate only the cries of all sorts of creatures. One of them will call of an evening at a well-to-do man's house in a village, and sit in the hall wrapped in a white sheet, waiting for the permission to begin his entertainment. On getting this he will sing like a bird, bark like a dog, or cry like a baby; in fact, he will reproduce any ordinary cry or voice you will wish him to do. Sometimes he will make people roar with laughter by mimicking the quarrel of two

neighbouring shrews; at others he will make them sad and quiet by wailing piercingly like a Hindoo mother bereaved of her young child, finishing up by imitating the soft words and purrs of two young lovers.

But the real professional mimic simulates only the appearance, gestures, and manners of various characters. He is more like a panto-mimist than an actor, for he talks but on rare occasions. Indeed, this dumb show is his principal function, as his native name, *baharupi*, or "various formed," shows. His great skill lies in painting his face and dressing his hair, etc., so as to closely resemble the features of the originals; and as he will never appear but late in the evenings in winter, his efforts at deception are greatly aided by the darkness which the villagers' dull, feeble lamps altogether fail to penetrate.

Some mimics are clever enough to represent two characters at one and the same time—for instance, an old man and his young wife. Looking sideways at the personator as he sits with the further side of his face covered, you see the pale complexion, the hollow cheeks, the wrinkled forehead, the gray hair, the un-

naturally bright, leering eyes, the suspicious eyebrows of the old bridegroom; and on his disclosing the other side of his face you recognise the smooth dimpling features, the bright complexion, the shiny black hair plaited up in a queue, the domineering eyebrows, the soft but restless eyes of the young wife. Often you see a man with half of his face painted white, with beads and snakes round the neck, the body covered with ashes, and a trident in the hand, representing Siva after the popular notion; while, as after a little time he turns the other side to you, the beautiful features of Párvati, the wife of Siva, are presented before your admiring eyes.

It is most curious to notice how he thus divides his face, and as he will never let you approach near or touch him you remain ignorant of his secret, which, however, he will let you into after a heavy backsheesh. And as they make you promise to keep the secret, I must helplessly leave to the cleverness of my readers to find it out.

One evening a little girl, listening to stories told by her grandmother in their country house, was startled by an unearthly shriek coming

from the outer apartments, and fainted away in the arms of her grandmother as, on going out with her, she saw the devil, as she said—a jet-black man, with blood running from his mouth from which the red tongue was hanging out, branches of Bel tree (sacred to Siva, the presiding deity of the demons) stuck all over the body, and other horrible things attached to his dress. A few weeks later there came to the same house a wily-looking, soft-mannered pedlar with a box under his arm, who made a present of a nice pair of scissors to the same girl, who lay ill of fright for a few days. But the latter would never believe that this pedlar was the devil himself.

Another time a whole village was thrown into a state of great excitement by the sudden appearance of a mad woman, raving in the most frantic manner and followed by a great crowd, some anxiously inquiring who the mad person was, others pitying her on her sad condition, and others trying to calm her down by many kind attentions. But the mad woman raved all the more, only making faces at them, throwing dust over their heads, or flourishing a heavy broom she was carrying in her hand.

At last they managed to see her to a lonely house where she said she lived. She entered it shouting and shrieking, and slammed the door against the wondering crowd outside. After a few minutes there popped out of an upper window of the house the head of a nice young man, who saluted the people waiting below, which sent them home bursting with laughter.

Once a zemindar, having a game at cards with his friends in the evening, was surprised to see an Englishman in tweed suit and white helmet, followed by a number of his tenants, who salaamed him very low. The zemindar thought that a murder or some such dreadful occurrence among his ryots must have brought the magistrate of the district to a remote village like his; and, leaving off playing, was going to receive the magistrate politely, when the whisper from an aged servant relieved him of his suspense and embarrassment. It was our old friend the mimic who thus paid him a visit.

I have chosen these representations of the Indian mimic, not because they are his best, but simply because they are some that have been actually seen. The professional mimics rarely, if at all, visit a European's house. They are

generally low-caste Hindoos. This, and their Hindoo name, and their frequenting remote villages where none but Hindoos dwell, lead me to believe that their profession is of native Indian origin.

FIGHTING-KITES.

It was late in summer some years back, when I was living in the suburbs of London, that a strange boy called on me to inquire if I had Indian kites with me, or if I could give him some information about them. Though unable to oblige my young inquirer in the way he desired, I was pleased to notice that boys here are awakening to a choice of better kites than the curious ones they fly at present. The thick picture-kites with long tails are after the fashion of the Chinese, who, however, are not backward in the use of lighter and more refined fighting-kites, which form the speciality of Indian kite-fliers. I shall touch here only on the main features of kite-flying in India.

In that country there are shops where they sell kites very cheap; so very few people make them at home. Besides, it wants a fine and practised hand to make the thin, well-balanced fighting-kites. They are made of one (square) shape, but of various sizes: the smallest being eight inches square, and the largest two feet square. The most common and useful ones are a foot square. Very thin but strong paper, resembling tissue or cigarette paper, of all colours, is used for the purpose. But whether the kite is made of one or different pieces of paper, it must be of the same thickness throughout. The backbone is a straight, flat, strong, well-finished lath, and the bow is made out of a cane or a piece of pliant wood half as thick as the backbone, round and knotless. The latter must be of equal thickness and weight throughout its whole length, as on it mainly depends the balance of the kite. The tail, which is merely a finish or an ornament, is triangular or round, measuring only two or three inches at the longest.

Strong card-thread is used to fly kites with. The English manufacturers would be surprised to learn the amount of cotton thread consumed

in India for this purpose; one lad using as much as 10,000 yards in the course of a year. Silken thread is also used, though rarely. The knots joining the pieces being made fine, smooth, and strong, the whole length of the thread is drawn through a mixture of fine pounded glass and light starch, which gives it a keen edge. The dried thread, which is now ready for fighting purposes, is then wound up on a wooden frame resembling a spool. Great ingenuity is spent in making this spool or roller light, useful, and handsome.

Next as to the motion of the kite. Two pieces exactly equal in length off the main thread are tied to the kite: one at the meeting-point of the bow and the backbone; the other, a few inches lower, to the backbone only. There are two useful kinds of motion, besides the ordinary straight one: the wheeling motion, in which the kite wheels round and round, and the quivering motion, in which its head keeps on quivering sideways as it flies upwards; both being very graceful. A practised hand can give to the kite either motion as he pleases. Of course a good deal depends on the proper fastening of the kite.

If it wheels too much you must make the lower fastening-thread shorter; or if it leans too much on one side you should stick a piece of paper or fine linen to the bow on the other side. Similarly there are other little means to regulate the motion of a kite.

As in all warfare, great skill and practice are required to fight well with kites, and manœuvring counts a great deal in paper actions. Sometimes the enemy has certain advantages over you; for instance, his house is higher than yours (in India kites are usually flown from the flat tops of houses), commanding a greater swoop; or his kite may be a little bigger than yours, in which case his thread will have a greater tension. These disadvantages one must learn to counteract; but these are details.

There are two methods of fighting—the *pull* method and the *loose* method. In the former, which is the quicker and more skilful of the two, you attack the enemy by leading your kite by a deep swoop under the other, and then at a judicious time pulling it so fast that your antagonist will fail to make the point, where your thread touches his, loose enough by letting out

his thread. You have a good chance of cutting his thread then. In the other method, which is more common, and which requires great patience and watchfulness, you lead your kite either over or under his, and then let out the thread, in which he follows. One has to be careful in this kind of fight as to which of the two motions—the wheeling or the quivering—he gives to the kite at different times.

The chances of winning are increased by a keener edge, a favourable breeze, or other small advantages. One might think that, everything being equal, it is a mere chance that you will cut the thread of your rival. But in this, as in many other things which look simple and seem to depend on chance, a good deal of cleverness and practice go to make up a fair victory. An evenly-matched fight in this method lasts a long time; I have often spent two or three hours over it. And great is the joy of winning. Sometimes the kites go so far that you can hardly see them, or it gets quite dark; in that case the fight has to end in an unsatisfactory draw.

With some, kite-fighting changes from a pastime

into a passion. All work, and even eating and sleeping, are abandoned in order to perfect oneself in this art. And great is the excitement which follows a good fight; sometimes (fortunately it is not common) high wagers are laid on it. In small towns there are champion kite-fighters, who devote as much time and attention to kites as some people do to boating and wrestling. In kite-flying there is no distinction of rank, or caste, or age. The young and the old—all take an equal delight in it: you do not come into close contact with other kite-fliers; and, it being an inexpensive game, anybody can indulge in it.

The kite-flying season in India lasts from March to September, barring the wet months. In England the best time for it would be August and September, when the weather gets a little bit steady. All that you want is a fine steady breeze in a clear atmosphere. In India boys fly kites generally in the afternoon, when it gets a little cool, for three or four hours until it gets dark. But there are some who pursue the game at all times of the day, heedless even of the scorching heat of the noon. Others delight in

watching the kite wheel up high in the heavens, as it glistens with the soft, serene light of the Indian moon, which makes our nights clearer than English November mid-days.

THE END.

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